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[PASSION FLOWERS.]

A BURIED SIN;

OR,

HAUNTED LIVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Kate Branksome's Foe," &c., &c.

CHAPTER V.

TEMPTATION.

Earth holds no deadlier foe than this—
A woman scorned.

"The flowers are very beautiful, Pepito."

"Mr. Darrell selected them himself, miladi. He has a taste the most superb."

"True; a taste often exercised in a similar manner, doubtless."

"But no. It is not his custom to weary himself. He gives seldom the bouquets, and he then chooses ordinarily by me, Pepito."

"Then I may consider myself particularly favoured."

"Without doubt, miladi. But to one so beautiful flowers les plus ravissantes. C'est comme il faut."

And the valet bows low to enforce the compliment.

"How is your master?"

"Always ennuyé, always triste, miladi. Smiles of the brightest welcome him everywhere, eyes of the most lovely say more than lips, and he cares—nothing."

"He lives a very dissipated life, I fear."

The valet's shoulders touch his ears in a deprecatory shrug.

"Miladi, what would you? He does as the others. Miladi is aware Mr. St. John Darrell's set is of the most fast in London."

"And meanwhile his fortune melts, of course?"

"Pardon. Of late he has been happy."

"How?"

"There are five thousand pounds he has gained this instant on the Dairbee."

"On the Derby! And he will lose ten on the Oaks!"

"I think—no. Monsieur has cut his teeth of wisdom."

"Why does he not marry?"

"He desires it not, miladi. Why, I cannot say. Soon we leave London."

Lady Dunraven starts.

"Where do you go?"

"To the castle of Milor Malbreckthane; to solace ourselves with ze cows, ze filleys, ze sheep."

And the valet looks ruefully sarcastic.

"Will you give my thanks to Mr. Darrell?"

says Lady Dunraven, slipping a piece of gold into the servant's hand, "and say I think the flowers are very, very lovely?"

Pepito retires, bowing gleefully.

She draws a mother-of-pearl writing case towards her, and nibbles the end of a quill meditatively.

"I must procure an invitation," she thinks, "but how to do it, that is the question. If Malbreckthane were in town the thing would be easy. I could twist him round my finger. Ah, I have it."

And with an impatient motion she draws paper to her and writes.

It is an artfully concocted epistle. She commences by deploring her husband's continued absence on the Continent, and begs the earl to favour her with a visit when next in town that she may consult him as Sir Miles Dunraven's most valued friend upon some pecuniary transactions she would rather not leave altogether to the lawyers.

"That will fetch him, poor simple soul, I hope and believe," she reflects. "Once here it will be odd if I cannot extract an invitation to Freston Castle. It would be an excellent removal for two reasons. In the first place it would throw me much into St. John Darrell's company in a quiet country house. In the second it would silence gossiping tongues by placing me under the protection of that unimpeachable British matron, Mrs. Carew. A necessary proceeding," she continues, bitterly. "Men's eyes follow me too much, and women's tongues wag maliciously. Perhaps I am not quite so careful as I might be. My chaperon is a perfect monster of prudence, thank goodness, or very highly coloured tales might possibly bring Sir Miles from across the seas to look after his spouse. If only he would tumble over a precipice, or get himself shot in one of the out-of-the-way places he is so fond of, what a happy release for the survivor. Does my beauty tempt Darrell at all, I wonder?"

Between two windows a long strip of looking-glass is let into the wall. Lady Dunraven crosses to it, and gravely contemplates her own reflection.

She sees a rounded figure, perfect in its proportions, voluptuous in its order of beauty. She

sees an undeniably handsome face, dark, sleepy, amorous eyes, red lips, between which gleam teeth of pearly whiteness, a wealth of glossy hair, growing low on the forehead, for which some women would almost sell their souls. She turns away with a proud smile, in which a little bitterness mingles.

"I carry my thirty years lightly," she thinks. "I am in the zenith of my charms. Can he be blind?"

It is later in the day. Lady Dunraven lounges in her boudoir listlessly turning the pages of a French novel. The monster of prudence is fast asleep in the drawing-room.

The soft glow of light shining through rose-coloured curtains enhances my lady's beauty. The room opens into a miniature conservatory, a Paradise of gorgeous blossoms. In an exquisite vase, within reach of her hand, is the bouquet sent her in the morning. Languidly she takes it up, and with shut eyes inhales the fragrance.

"Will he come?" she wonders.

The rich tropical scents seem to answer her with passionate love-words from the hot south. She reclines in a sweet day dream. A soft flush deepens the brilliant roses of her cheeks, and a man who enters noiselessly on the thick carpet contemplates the picture with an artist's critical appreciation.

"You look like the sleeping princess in a fairy tale, Lady Dunraven."

"Have you slain the dragon who guards me?" she rejoins, with a quick start of pleasure. "If not, how did you elude her?"

"I found her asleep in the drawing-room, and left her in blissful unconsciousness. I thought I might find you here."

"The servants must have forgotten themselves strangely to let you wander about the house in such a manner."

"The servants knew nothing of the migration. If you are as idle and sleepy as you look I can repeat it."

"No, you may stay, whilst I thank you for these flowers."

"You did so unconsciously as I entered. They were at your lips."

She blushes rosily. These pretty, meaningless speeches which fall so easily from his lips, implying much or nothing, are very sweet to her.

"And what construction did you put on that, sir?"

"Simply that you are extremely fond of flowers."

She searches the dark, emotionless, reposeful face with its air of languid serenity, but it baffles her. There is no feeling in the eyes, they coolly admire, that is all.

"Then you are wrong. I like flowers as I do all pretty things, but I am 'extremely fond' only of some people who send them to me."

"If I could flatter myself I were included amongst the 'some people' how happy I should be."

"You are quite capable, Mr. Darrell, of conceitedly flattering yourself to that extent."

"Possibly, a harmless delusion."

"Might not imagined love beget love?" she asks.

"Never, in a man."

"Then what will?"

"The love-philts of the middle ages possibly. I cannot say, for I have no personal experiences from which to draw deductions."

"Do you mean to assert you never felt the tender passion?" she inquires, eagerly.

"Yes—no—a hundred times—never."

"I fail to understand you."

"I fail to understand your question," he retorts. "Put it more minutely and I will answer. Describe the symptoms of the disease and I will tell you whether I have felt its ravages."

"That is an evasion. You know well enough. Besides, I can only describe how it affects a woman."

"Then do so."

His languid eyes scan her flushed face amusedly, and she does not dare to meet them. She is hot and cold in one breath, her heart

throbs painfully, a flood of words trembles on her lips; shall she let it loose?

"Tell me," urges the calm voice.

"Love becomes her life," she answers, vehemently. "It gives no respite night or day, but the pain has subtle sweetness. It magnifies its object to the proportions of a giant, it dwarfs all the world besides, friends, kindred, good repute, a fair name, till they seem as grains of sand. It blinds her to danger, it blunts her perceptions of right and wrong, it destroys fear and almost shame, it renders her reckless of consequences and careless of opinion save that of him she loves."

The words themselves, the changing colour, the trembling voice, thrilling with passion, the heaving bosom, are a revelation.

St John Darrell receives it as unmoved as he might witness some hackneyed dramatic impersonation.

"Your description is graphic indeed. What if the woman who loves as you describe discovers she has a rival?"

Lady Dunraven's face blanches and she looks at him with startled eyes. Something reassures her possibly, for she laughs gently. It is not healthy laughter, an evil note runs through it, arousing him from imperturbability to an involuntary shudder.

"Do you not remember Fair Rosamond's fate? Does history furnish no instances of wronged women's vengeance?"

"A pleasant prospect for the rival," laughs Darrell.

"You are evading the original question, sir," she cries, jestingly. "I have described what I believe to be a woman's passion, did you never experience similar emotions?"

"Heaven forbid! If I could be strung up to such a pitch I should go mad."

"All love is madness I think," she rejoins, sadly.

"It is easy to see whence you learn such a creed," he says, lightly touching the French novel. "What is the work? A most improper one, a very unfit book for any woman to read."

"You must have tasted the forbidden fruit or you could not tell its flavour."

"Bad logic, but I grant the proposition. Do you not know men may touch pitch and not be defiled, though women cannot?"

"Society says so. It is grossly unfair, and I will never accept such a law. Society is not my god."

"What is your god?"

The colour begins to deepen again in her peach-like cheeks. Long lashes droop over eyes which have a sleepy fire of passion in their dark depths.

"I know but one, his name is—Love."

"Nor did the heroine in your novel, and because her life was one great ruthless sacrifice—the sacrifice of home, husband, children, reputation, life itself—she is lauded as a worshiper and wept over as a martyr. It is a pernicious book."

"Because in real life the woman is not lauded, but reviled; not wept over, but jeered at. To our sex the world is a harsh and cruel one."

"It exacts rigid decorum, that is all. The world your Frenchman portrays is one of false sentiment, in which all the good characters stalk on moral stilts, and the bad ones do the most eccentric things, for the simple reason their feelings prompt them. A world in which no man's hearth is sacred, or his honour safe, since any shallow coxcomb may inspire Madame with a grand passion rendered rather more piquant by the trifling consideration that the lady is already married. Decorum is virtue's great safeguard, in my opinion."

"Oh, yes," she retorts, scornfully, "you hedge us about with restrictions, you preserve your wives as you do your pheasants. My sympathies are with the poacher, I own. If a man have not force of character enough to win or to retain his wife's love, let a worthier take it and her."

"For your own sake I trust you do not ventilate such opinions extensively, Lady Dunraven."

"I talk like this to no one but you," she murmurs, softly.

"Not even to your sleeping dragon, Mrs. Trollope?"

"I shall not answer that question, sir. Come into the conservatory and I will give you one little button-hole in return for all these gorgeous blossoms."

They pass into close, fragrant air, between stands of broad-leaved plants and costly exotics. She pauses before a single white geranium, perfect in its delicate beauty.

"This is my choice for you."

"I am more than content."

She severs the stalk with a pair of tiny scissors, and offers him the flower. He puts his hands behind him, and smiles at her.

"Nay; the offering is not complete if the work of decoration be left to my clumsy fingers."

"Suppose I refuse to undertake it?"

"That were a refusal without precedent. No lady yet declined to adorn the knight who wore her favours in the lists."

The gay words are utterly meaningless, but her too vivid fancy gives them significance. He acknowledges himself her knight then. A delicious, disbelieving joy thrills every nerve.

The little waxen hand, white almost as the blossoms, trembles so violently it can scarcely accomplish its task.

They stand face to face; his lips almost touch her hair. They are for the moment as much alone, as far removed from all the world, as the first man and woman in Paradise. All his life he has been a keen admirer of feminine loveliness, it cannot fail to impress him now. He notes everything with an artist's attention to details, the graceful folds of her trailing dress, the tiny, projecting slipper, the proportions of the swelling bust, the satin smoothness of skin, which at neck and throat vies in purity with costly lace, and yet his blood runs tranquilly as ever. It is a graceful picture to him, nothing more, save that, at sight of the fluttering fingers of agitation, the cause of which he knows so well, some faint pity creeps into his cold eyes.

"There," she says, nervously, brushing some down from his coat with a gentle, caressing motion, "there; it is done."

He arrests the white hand and touches it lightly with his lips, with a murmured "Thank you."

In an instant her arms are about his neck, her hot face is hidden on his shoulder, her lips whisper passionate, incoherent words, such as women should breathe to but one man on the face of the wide earth—a lover or a husband.

He is taken altogether by surprise. That light, downward sweep of the drooping moustache was no sign of affection, but a careless tribute of thanks, a gallantry of homage natural as the drawing of a breath to men like St. John Darrell.

He is bitterly annoyed at the result of his own imprudence. A "scene" of any kind is his pet abhorrence, and now his thoughtlessness has precipitated one.

Gently, but with unrelenting decision, he frees himself from the clinging arms and places her in a slight chair of iron wire. She steals one glance at the calm, stern face. It is that of accuser and judge in one, and, as though to shut it out, she presses white finger-tips tightly over her eyes.

There is an awkward pause, in which he racks his brains for words which shall for ever forbid, without humiliating her, similar mis-construction—a pause in which she abandons herself despairingly to a tempest of conflicting emotions, shame, love, hatred, anger.

"Lady Dunraven?"

"That is my title. I bartered youth and beauty for it ten years ago, but you need not remind me of the fact."

"You have superb womanhood and peerless beauty still."

"Have I?" she asks, humbly. "Have I any grace in your sight, St. John Darrell?"

"You have my warmest admiration," he replies, coldly, "as one of the handsomest women in London."

"And you have—my love."

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The words are a low wail of sorrow.

"Hush, Lady Dunraven! If you bestow on me more than that friendliness which is the natural result of ordinary intimacy, you bestow what I have neither sought nor desired. Let us ignore and altogether forget the last half-hour of our lives and be friends again."

"Friends? Never! Foes, if you will."

"I trust not."

"You trust not," she repeats, mockingly, "but the words are cold as though your veins ran with ice-water instead of blood. Do you not know there are extremes between which some women cannot pause?"

She rises and stands before him, her face colourless, her eyes flashing fire.

"Life and death, love and hatred, forgiveness and revenge, happiness and misery; they are extremes, are they not? Beware a woman's vengeance, St. John Darrell, both upon yourself and upon her fortunate rival."

He smiles slightly.

"I am curious to meet her, Lady Dunraven; perhaps you will find her for me."

Questioningly, suspiciously, she searches his face, but it tells nothing in its dark repose.

"You try to mislead. Who is she, the girl who shines me down, before whose image my charms pale, the remembrance of whose loveliness makes you blind and deaf and obdurate?"

He makes a slight gesture of impatience, and there is grave rebuke in his tones.

"It is not fitting you should speak of these things, Lady Dunraven. I aspire to no woman's love, least of all to love which implies another man's dishonour."

She accepts the rebuke meekly, almost gladly. In her heart she is whispering:

"I have no rival—no rival. I may win him yet."

"Mr. Darrell," she whispers, softly, after a pause, "I would say something to you, with a faint hope you may be generous enough to credit it."

The voice is very humble, the beautiful head is bowed in seeming contrition.

St. John Darrell's heart aches a little for this fair woman who loves not wisely but too well.

"I would remind you," she continues, "that my marriage is a bond connecting people so entirely unsuited to each other that for four years almost the husband has elected to wander alone in foreign lands, collecting materials for a new work on insect life, and thinking more of scientific fame than of the deserted wife who rejoices at his absence."

Darrell bows gravely.

"As you know, the world sharpens its wit on such unhappiness. It has Argus eyes to detect the slightest variation from the code of propriety, and yet I think its censorious tongue has little to bring against me. You know best."

"Little indeed."

"Until to-day I have never forgotten wifely duty, empty name though it be. There lives but one man who could make me forget again. All I ask for the dreary, desolate future is his forgiveness—his friendship."

"The first you do not need, the second you have already. We shall not meet for a few weeks, Lady Dunraven, I am going out of town shortly. Meanwhile let us forget altogether."

She is alone. Alone in the bright June sunshine, with the scent of the flowers, with the ceaseless iteration of his parting words in her throbbing brain.

"Let us forget. Let us forget?" she repeats. "Never!"

CHAPTER VI.

AN ADVENTURE AND A SURPRISE.

She's pretty to walk with,
And witty to talk with,
And pleasant too to think on.

THERE is as much bustle and commotion at the little branch station of Freston as though

it were a great commercial centre. The important official who combines the duties of booking clerk, telegraph clerk, occasional signalman and pointsman, with those of station-master, looks his till with a flourish, shuts his office door with a slam, and arouses an irritable old gentleman, who, after expending forty minutes in vigorous grumbling at having to wait three quarters of an hour in such a world-forgotten hole, has dropped off to sleep for the remaining five.

The solitary porter rings an immense bell with much unnecessary expenditure of muscular energy, and the train comes slowly in, snorting and puffing as though its strength were severely tried by the task of transporting the three passengers who alight, and who prove to be its sole occupants.

With an eye to a possible sixpence—the by-laws of the company notwithstanding—the porter puts down the bell and touches his hat to the only individual who wears the unmistakable air of gentleman.

"Luggage, sir?"

"A box and a large portmanteau, labelled 'Howard.' You will find them in the van."

The box and portmanteau are disinterred without much difficulty and the dialogue recommences.

"I expected a carriage to meet me from Freston Castle."

At this collateral evidence of the stranger's respectability the porter touches his hat again.

"Hain't seen none, sir."

"Have you an hotel within easy distance, whence I could hire a vehicle?"

"There's Jim Barlow's trap, sir, at the 'Spade and Whistle,' but that's a matter o' nearly two mile, and his hoss is lame, I know."

"How far is the castle from here?"

"Three mile, sir—along the road and turn up the avenue by the keeper's lodge."

"Then I will walk. Perhaps you will look after my luggage. I will send for it in the course of the day."

With an appreciative grin the porter stretches his hand for the proffered donation.

"There's a shorter cut, sir, by the fields."

Mostyn looks at the dusty, chalky road, winding in the distance like a long, white serpent, and heaves a sigh of relief. This hot June day the sun bears considerable power.

"How can I find it?"

"You keep straight along, sir, for a quarter of a mile till you come to a stile on the left by a cottage. There's an old woman lives there as'll show you which path to take. It'll lead you up to the castle in half an hour."

Following instructions Mostyn finds the stile and the cottage, but no old woman. The door is locked, faint blue smoke ascends from the chimney, but not a soul is in sight, and there are three paths, one wending apparently into the heart of a wood, one skirting it on the left, and one on the right running parallel with the road.

Under these circumstances he sits down on a rustic bench and waits impatiently for about five minutes, by which time his young blood tires of the forced inaction and he rises again.

"I might wait till sunset for the old witch," he thinks, "and see her come riding home on a broomstick at last."

So he faces the three paths again and revolves probabilities.

"If I bear to the right I shall probably come into the road once more, if I strike into the wood I may not meet anyone until I am lost inextricably. If I take this path to the left—"

The old "rule of the road" comes into his head, and he hails it as a happy omen.

"If you go to the left you are sure to go right," he repeats. "Allons!"

A pleasant shady way leading under arching boughs along which squirrels scuttie in mock terror. A way that takes him by green corn fields, in which brown rabbits are feeding by hundreds, who scamper back into the wood at the intruder's footfall. A way that skirts fragrant clover meadows, where the cut clover lies

drying under the hot June sun, and whence the mowers have mysteriously disappeared; probably to eat their bread and cheese and quaff great horns of beer in the shade of the hedge-rows. A way that brings him presently across a rippling brook, and over a five-barred gate, to a sight which sends his heart into his mouth with astonished terror.

It is an infuriated bull chasing a girl with vicious intent. She is running at headlong speed towards the gate, but the brute's head is already lowered in act to charge. Mostyn has barely time to note that the girl's cheeks are flushed, not blanched; that her dilated eyes tell of mischievous, gleeful alarm rather than of fright, ere he springs to the rescue, with a very vague idea how it is to be effected.

Instinctively he shouts at the utmost pitch of his lungs and dashes forward hat in hand, brandishing it violently. At this threatening display of force the bull pauses in his onset to contemplate the assailant, doubtless wondering in his bovine mind at such foolhardiness, yet not quite liking the steady stare fixed upon him.

The stare is removed. Mostyn turns his head for an instant to see the fugitive scrambling over the gate in most undignified fashion. The bull, balked and furious, sees her too, and lowers his massive head for vengeance. Erect, motionless as a statue, the newcomer awaits the charge. A shrill feminine scream comes from behind the five-barred gate.

The charge is over. At the critical moment Mostyn leaps aside with a sudden spring just sufficient to clear him. In another instant he has the animal by the tail, and is being dragged round the field at racing speed, until in about four minutes he comes opposite the rescued damsel, when a vault places him in safety by her side.

"Hot work!" ejaculates the breathless champion.

A peal of silvery laughter answers. The young lady sinks upon a green bank, exhausted with uncontrollable merriment.

"Please pardon me," she gasps. "I really cannot help it. Anything more utterly absurd than your race round the field at the bull's tail you cannot imagine."

Mostyn laughs merrily.

"But I can imagine something much more absurd."

"What is it?"

"The back view of a young lady tumbling over a high gate, more like an animated sack of flour than a human being."

She pouts a little at the retort. Mostyn thinks how like coral the red lips are.

"Don't be impertinent, sir. Own you were terribly frightened when our friend yonder decided to toss you."

"Not half so frightened as someone who screamed vigorously just at that instant."

She pouts still more.

"You are incorrigible. If I were not exceedingly hot and lazy for one thing, and if you had not just saved me from being bored by rather pointed arguments for another, I would get up and leave you."

Mostyn throws himself on the opposite bank.

"If you own to heat and laziness, what must be my condition? Pray do not leave me. I have come quite two miles I am sure without meeting a soul. I begin to think all the inhabitants are in enchanted sleep, that you are the witch who worked the spell, and that the bull is Nemesis."

"Then you should not have interfered. Nemesis would have overtaken the witch and made an end of her. There would be one useless thing the less upon earth."

"Are you useless?"

"Quite."

"So are wild flowers."

Mostyn looks at her intently, trying to guess her station, but it baffles him. She wears a muslin dress which might have been donned for the first time that morning, so fresh, spotless and uncreased it appears save for a great daub

in front, as though she had been kneeling in a muddy place, and save for a rent of about half a yard in the skirt. Her accent is pure, her speech refined, but quite unconventional. Her manners have the freedom and ease of a child rather than of good society. Her hair is in the wildest disorder, and part of it comes tumbling down as she removes her broad hat to fan herself, an accident which in no way embarrasses her. The black eyes are brimful of the wildest mischief; the brunette complexion in its clear white and red rivals the purity of a blonde. The little mischievous rosebud of a mouth answers every thought, and as the thoughts are smiling ones, gleams of teeth like pearls seen through gates of coral, dazzle him. The slender, shapely hands are browned and scratched, but they show no trace of labour. He is sure of but one thing, that she is provokingly sweet and charming. For the rest she puzzles him. "So are wild flowers." The pretty speech creeps to his lips because the analogy forces itself. He does not utter it as a compliment nor does she accept it as one.

"So you have found out that I am wild. It is true. I hate restraint. I cannot be caged. I must be free; free as a bird. I wish I had wings."

He smiles at the short, impetuous sentences; at the wilful, childish manner; at the pretty picture she makes against the green background of bank and hedgerow as she sits playing with her hat. She has half filled it with the flowers to which he compares her and is swinging them energetically to and fro.

The much-enduring elastic string breaks. Wild honeysuckle, scarlet poppies, field forget-me-nots descend upon Mostyn's head in mad confusion. A piece of sweet-brier catches in his whiskers, and lodges there.

Again the silvery laughter peals forth. It is a child's laughter, sweet, free, joyous, with no undertone of sadness in its gay ripple. To this prematurely grave young man, on whose features a practised physiognomist would trace the impress of a great sorrow or a great sin, it is irresistibly infectious. From the moment in which he first saw her he has forgotten the burden of the past, and lived only in the present, wooed to oblivion by some subtle chord of sympathy between natures so different.

"A witch" he called her in jest a few moments ago, unconscious how the spell is working on himself. Unconscious that in spirit he has gone back more than half his young life, to the days which took no thought for the morrow, to the innocent pleasures of racing in the green grass, resting on a mossy bank, being pelted with wild flowers by a childish companion.

He disentangles the sweet-brier, and laughs also as he throws it away. For months he has worked in the dingy London rooms, in the foul, city air, to the ceaseless hum of crowded streets. This oasis in life's desert is inexplicably grateful. He has forgotten all his cares, the object of his journey, the explanation even of his presence in that particular spot, in the supreme good of the toiler—perfect rest.

"If you had wings," he said, "you would still be like the flowers. You would soar a little, and come to earth again."

"To pull somebody's hair?"

"I daresay. It is quite sufficient motive for the descent of a goddess."

"If I were a goddess it should be always early summer like this. The verdure should be as fresh, and the flowers as beautiful, and the air as soft, with the scent of the clover in it."

"And exasperated bullocks should be as lambs, wreathed with daisies," said Mostyn, gaily, "and locked gates should fly open deferentially at Flora's approach."

"If you are impudent, sir, I shall order you to go away. Do you know that you are a trespasser?"

The question recalls him to the object of his journey.

"No. I am trying to find Freston Castle. I turned into this path by the keeper's lodge."

The dark eyes sparkle with mischievous glee.

"Then you have walked exactly two miles in the wrong direction. By retracing your steps you will arrive at the starting-point. You will then be three miles from the Castle by road, or half the distance by the right field path."

Mostyn groans.

"Is there no other route?"

The lustrous eyes dance still more merrily.

"I fear you are extremely idle. Yes, you can cross the domain of our friend the bull, and skirt the wood, bearing constantly to the right. You will thus reach the Castle in little more than five miles."

"Is there no other alternative?"

"You can go through the wood, about twenty minutes' walk."

Mostyn springs joyfully to his feet.

"But the right path," continues his tormentor, "is curiously intersected by about one hundred and fifty wrong ones. Should you take one of these you may possibly wander till night-fall."

Mostyn sits down again, despairingly.

"What you require is a guide. Some small boy skilled in woodcraft, possessed of an avaricious soul, to whom sixpence would be a fortune."

"Yes," assents Mostyn, eagerly.

His companion shakes her head gravely with mock compassion. An unruly tress or two falls upon her shoulders. She tosses them back with a careless gesture.

"Unfortunately there are no small boys in this neighbourhood." Her voice sinks to a thrilling whisper. "There is a fatality about them; they disappear mysteriously. My own impression is, that they perish in a night like Jonah's gourd."

Mostyn represses an ejaculation of impatience, and rises once more to his feet.

"Are you well up in chemistry?" she asks, suddenly.

"Not particularly. Why?"

"I want to know how much quicksilver there is in a man's composition?"

He laughs.

"Men have serious business in life. Idling on grassy banks is pleasant, but unfruitful. I must get back again to the keeper's lodge."

"Not so. I will be your guide through the wood for a consideration."

"Of what nature?"

"A pecuniary one, of course. You must give me a piece of silver. Quicksilver, you know," she says, demurely.

He smiles amusedly, yet with an approach to his ordinary quiet thoughtfulness.

"Child, you mistake. There is little quicksilver in my composition. But we might borrow, perhaps, from each other's natures with mutual advantage."

"Then if you cannot pay me in quicksilver you shall be my slave, to fetch and carry for the time being. I want ferns and flowers and a hundred things beside. Do you accept?"

"I could ask no better office," he says, bowing gallantly.

She frowns.

"Talk naturally and truthfully, if you please. I dislike even an approach to affectation. Speak honest truth always."

He bows again, but with a merry twinkle in his eyes.

"Guides should not waste time quarrelling with their employers, or talking inanities; they should lead on."

The mischievous mouth makes a saucy moue at him, but she springs to her feet, and dashes along the path by which he came, uttering one word:

"Follow!"

They pass a little wicket gate a hundred yards back, and find themselves in a mossy path winding amongst the trees. With an exclamation of delight his companion pounces upon a delicate fern growing by the roots of a noble old oak.

"Now, sir, your labours commence," she cries. "Cut round the roots with your pocket knife. I must transplant this to my rockery. If you do it very neatly you shall be shown my favourite shortly—a great-coat fir."

"A great-coat fir?" repeats Mostyn. "Do you mean some article of clothing?"

"You are thinking of a furred great-coat," she retorts. "I speak of a fir-tree whose trunk is protected by quite soft bark like an overcoat two inches thick. Such a beauty my favourite is—a perfect king among trees."

So Mostyn carries the fern, and they come to the "great-coat fir," which amply warrants her description.

"See how the bark breaks away, almost as easily as moss," she says. "But the branches are quite bare. Oh! look, look, such a dear little deserted nest. I have a collection at home. You must get it for me."

Amid merry laughter, which seems to imbue him for the moment with her own childish mood, and much bantering upon his awkwardness, he climbs the tree and brings down the prize in triumph.

Then she covets a curious creeping plant, some prickly gorse, and so many floral treasures, he becomes neither more nor less than a beast of burden, as he laughingly tells her. And in time they reach an avenue of giant trees stretching in one direction to an almost interminable vista. In the other, close upon them, stands a magnificent rambling mansion, in which at least three distinct styles of architecture are discernible.

"That is Freston Castle," she says, gravely. "I will relieve you of my treasures. Place them in my hat."

"Have I not brought you out of your way?"

"No. I am simply going round to the servants' entrance."

"Please let me carry them for you?"

"Put them in the hat," she repeats; and he obeys.

She extends a tiny brown palm, very soft to the touch. He holds it an instant longer than he had need perhaps. Some undefinable attraction makes him cling lingeringly to this odd acquaintanceship.

"I am Mostyn Howard, tutor to Lord Ferrara," he says, hoping a little for some corresponding confession, for which the instinct of a gentleman forbids a petition. "Shall we ever meet again?"

A curious expression flits across the mobile features which he is at a loss to interpret.

"Possibly. You have called me witch, goddess, child. When next we meet I may appear in a new role. I live at Freston Castle."

With swift steps she moves away, and he stands gazing in puzzled bewilderment until she disappears.

"Who is she?" he wonders. "A connection of the housekeeper possibly, since she goes to the servants' entrance, and yet she has the accent and the features of England's haughtiest daughters, the carriage of an empress."

With a restless doubt still in his mind he ascends the great stone steps flanked with the crest of the lords of Malbreckthane and their motto, "Dare all, dare all."

"A brave old sentiment," he thinks, bitterly. "One that might befit a penniless adventurer like myself."

A gigantic being is sunning himself and admiring the elegant proportions of his calves at the top.

He stares somewhat superciliously at the intruder's stained habiliments, which have not come scatheless from the ordeal of tree climbing.

"Is the Earl of Malbreckthane at home?"

The footman withdraws a silver tooth-pick from the pocket of his gorgeous waistcoat, and uses it for a second or two ere he deigns a reply.

"No-o," he draws, languidly. "His lordship proceeded—aw—to town last evening."



[A TIMELY INTERVENTION.]

"I am Mr. Howard, tutor to Lord Ferrars."

The tooth-pick disappears magically; the man becomes alert and respectful. It is evident that the earl's promise will be kept to the letter.

"Will you kindly step within, sir? Your apartments are quite in readiness, but we did not expect you for a few days. You did not write, sir, or the carriage would have met you at the station."

"My letter arrived this morning."

"Then it would not be opened, sir, in his lordship's absence."

"I left my luggage in the porter's care."

"It shall be sent for, sir, immediately. This way, sir. The family will take luncheon in half an hour. May I say you will join them, or will you be pleased to order refreshments at once?"

"I will join them. Meanwhile, I shall be glad of a bath."

Mostyn's toilette is a somewhat lengthy one. Soap and water have to be used freely to remove traces of his bird-nesting exploits, as he has no change of clothing.

The half-hour fully expires ere he announces readiness to join the ladies.

A majestic figure in black silk rises at his entrance and bows with severe dignity. Her features might serve a sculptor for an impersonation of a Roman matron. Her iron-grey hair is worn in an exploded fashion, forming a small roll on either cheek.

"Mr. Howard, I am Mrs. Carew. This is my daughter, Blanche."

Mostyn makes his obeisance to a young lady with a wealth of golden hair, large blue eyes, and a sweet Madonna face, in which the closest observer would be puzzled to detect the slightest resemblance to her mother's aquiline nose and powerful features.

"And this is Lady Clare Darrell."

From a corner of the room, in which she has been searching for a sheet of music, comes a slim girl in an exquisite morning robe. Her dark hair, drawn back in a smooth, unbroken sweep

from the temples, shows to advantage the intellectual proportions of the small, queenly head, and the close-fitting dress hides but little the elegance of a form graceful as that of a young fawn.

The white linen at throat and wrists, the dainty simplicity of her attire, the perfect neatness which characterises her, are aids to the effect produced of marvellous aristocratic beauty, and in this peerless, high-born demoiselle, crossing the room with that swimming ease of motion he has noted before, Mostyn Howard recognises his witch and goddess of the fields and the woods, the girl whose flushed face, torn dress, scratched brown hands, untidy picturesqueness of aspect and unconventionalality of manner, cost him so many surmises as to her position.

An inclination, so slight as to be barely perceptible, of the proud little head is all the acknowledgment of the introduction that Lady Clare vouchsafes.

She holds a piece of music to Blanche, almost ignoring the tutor's presence.

"Here is the song," she says; "such a hunt I have had to find it."

It seems to Mostyn that even her intonation has altered in the metamorphosis. It had before struck him as refined, now its singular sweetness and purity move him to admiration. It is clear and placid as the notes of a silver bell.

Evidently it is not her pleasure to allude to the adventures of an hour ago. Somewhat piqued he turns again to Mrs. Carew.

"And this," says that lady, with a glance towards a lounge on which reclines, without the slightest apparent intention of moving, a manly young fellow who might readily pass for twenty years of age, "this is Lord Ferrars. Ferrars, let me present you to—"

"My bear-leader. I have no marked partiality for bear-leaders," says the lad, with sullen emphasis.

"And I have a rooted aversion to bears, Mrs. Carew," is Mostyn Howard's quiet retort.

(To be Continued.)

A SPRIG OF MISTLETOE: A CHRISTMAS STORY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"A Pretty Angier," "A Mysterious Husband,"
"A Little Love Chat," "Won Without
Wooring," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XX.

AN IMPUDENT BASCAL.

And yet why chide those orbs divine
Whence unveiled caerubs sparkling rove
To gild those rays in which they shine,
And ripen rapture into love?

VIDA was more amazed than alarmed at the sight of the gentleman who rightly or wrongly bore the name of Fortescue, and recovering from the momentary confusion which his unexpected arrival caused her, she resumed her ordinary composure and waited for him to speak.

He bowed with the self-possession of consummate impudence, put his hat upon the table, drew off a pair of very new and very red dog-skin gloves and dropped them into it, honouring Vida as he did so with a second bow.

"You were at my place yesterday," he said, "and uncommon sorry I was to see you there. The general run of people I get are something below you I can tell you."

"Explain as briefly as you can why you are here now," Vida said.

"I'll come to it in due time," he replied. "But it requires a little leading up to it. I want you to understand everything clearly. You are an orphan I believe—that is your father is dead. The lady who was with you yesterday is, I presume, your mother."

"If you have anything to say to the application I made let me hear it at once," Vida said.

"Pardon me, all in due time," Mr. Fortescue took a chair now and putting one elbow upon the table leaned his head easily and as he may have imagined gracefully upon it. "Now you being an orphan places you in a very peculiar position—a painful position I may say. Difficulties and danger bristle around you and you require a protector."

"Sir," exclaimed Vida, her indignation rising rapidly, and shining out from her eyes.

"You require a protector—a friend," persisted Mr. Fortescue. "One with some knowledge of the world, one with a little means to keep a wife. Now my agency is a paying concern. I frankly admit it to you that it is all bunkum about a situation, there are none to be had. I advertise for people who are likely to put down their money without any demur and not likely to make much fuss when they get nothing for it."

"In plain terms," said Vida, "you are a swindler. Leave the room, sir."

"Not yet, not yet," said he, softly. "Hear me first. I make nearly a thousand a year out of that concern, and a thousand a year brings many comforts. I've the run of all the theatres too, and if you really want to see a little life why I'm the man to show it to you."

He paused, for the expression of Vida's face was a puzzle to him. A tendency to allow her indignation to merge into laughter was apparent. The fellow was both ludicrous and offensive.

"You—you seem amused," he said, after a pause.

"I must confess to finding in you something I have never marked before," Vida said, calmly.

"Hitherto I have only seen beings who possess at least ordinary principles and common sense. I presume you have been leading up to an offer of marriage."

"Well, yes, perhaps so," he said.

"And how could you be so foolish as to think that any proposition from you could be accepted by me? Good morning."

She turned from him and walked to a chair nearest the window and sat down. He rose up with a frown on his face and his cheeks saffron colour.

"Come," he said, "you don't mean to tell me that you refuse an offer—an offer of MARRIAGE from me?"

"I do most assuredly," Vida replied. "You are a foolish person, and I must beg of you to leave this room instantly. Do not trouble me to ring to have you removed."

"You little pert minx," he said, losing his temper. "And I thought you so quiet to. But I see it all—what'd ye call it? coyness; and I can tell you that it won't do with me. If I hadn't thought you looked at me kindly yesterday I shouldn't be here now neglecting my business. I watched your mother out, thinking we could talk better when—"

"Will you leave the room, sir?"

"No, I won't," he said, flatly, "until I've had some reward for the bother of coming here. I'll have one kiss, for I never yet knew the gal who could quite do as she liked with me, and a kiss I'll have, so take it quietly or I'll have two."

He was half way across the room bent upon carrying out his threat when a strong, nervous hand was placed upon his coat collar and he found himself spinning across the room and from thence blundering downstairs in a most bewildering fashion until he reached the hall, where he fell and lay on his back until his hat came bounding down after him.

"I give you five seconds to get out of the house," said somebody above, and Mr. Fortescue, acting with more discretion than valour, got into the street without delay.

Then, however, he showed his teeth again and bawled for the police. A member of the force happened to be near and he came up with a dozen idlers and stragglers at his heels.

"Now, sir," he said, "what is it?"

"I've been assaulted and almost murdered in that house," said Mr. Fortescue, "and I give them in charge."

"Can't take the charge, sir," the officer replied. "You must summon the party."

"And who may it be that he's going to summon from my house?" asked the dulcet voice of a woman, and Mrs. Stiffet pushed her way to the front.

Mrs. Stiffet had been to the public-house to see what o'clock it was, and she had moistened the study of the flight of time with a little gin and peppermint. Hence it arose that her nose was red, her eye moist, and her general bearing defiant.

Not getting an immediate answer she repeated her question with just sufficient variation to relieve it from monotony.

"And who in my house is to be summoned and what may be the pettiest charge?"

"This party's been assaulted there, that's all," the policeman exclaimed, as he walked on, "but he's got a remedy, and I've told him what to do."

"And when the jack-a-napes have done it—what then?" asked Mrs. Stiffet, folding her arms and glaring defiance at Mr. Fortescue, who quailed visibly, and gave the little crowd an opportunity to indulge in derisive laughter.

Mrs. Stiffet immediately had half a score of backers, and as there did not appear to be a prospect of getting fun out of anyone else, she was urged to fall upon him without delay.

"He's been a trying to steal the plate," suggested a man who lived in a court just round the corner. "All the family silver's been in peril, old lady."

Something in these remarks excited Mrs. Stiffet, and her eyes flashed fire, but she still spoke calmly, and confined her remarks to Mr. Fortescue.

"And who, young man," she asked, "are you going to summons—is it?"

"No, it isn't," he answered, as he walked on, "and you needn't bother."

Walking away was bad policy, for the movement excited Mrs. Stiffet to follow him up and make him with a verbal fire that harassed him considerably. Preserving as much dignity as possible he sauntered to the corner of the street, where a cab happened to be waiting, and into this he got, followed by the hooting of the little mob. As he was driven away a cheer was given for Mrs. Stiffet, who, in the elevation arising out of victory, offered to refresh her leading supporters, and the offer was accepted without the slightest hesitation.

It was Beaumont who had so opportunely returned and freed Vida from the insults of the impudent, rascally swindler. He had returned alone, and coming upstairs with a quick, light step that had not been heard, arrived without warning, and hearing sufficient to know that Vida was being insulted, he took the prompt measures described to rid the house of the offender.

"Who is that fellow?" he asked, as he returned to the room after assuring himself that the fellow he pitched downstairs had left the house.

Vida, who was now pale as a statue, put her arm through his, and in a few words told how it was she had been subjected to the doubtful attentions of the adventuring swindler. Beaumont was furious, and would have followed him down to administer a sound thrashing to the fellow if Vida had not held him fast.

"No, no, Beaumont," she said; "what good would it do? It was foolish of mother and I to go upon such an errand perhaps, but we did it for the best. What have you done to-day?"

"Nothing," groaned Beaumont as he sank into a chair, "and I don't see any chance of it. What a horrible life it is. The colonel is gone down to the War Office. General Bingley has returned from India, and as they were old chums he may be able to help him to some post."

They heard nothing of the disturbance in the street, being engrossed in talk, and half an hour afterwards the colonel returned with a very gloomy face. He had seen General Bingley, who could hardly remember him, and was quite sure he could do nothing to help him.

"And yet I have a remembrance of eternal friendship being sworn between us," the colonel said, bitterly; "but friendship appears to me like breath on a mirror—it soon passes away."

The return of Mrs. Haverland from her outing for domestic purposes led to a repetition of the story of Mr. Fortescue's visit, which made the colonel almost wild with fury and drew tears from his wife, but Vida ridiculed the whole thing, then Beaumont laughed at it, and finally they all put a smiling face upon it and voted the impertinent visitor to be simply a fool.

But the matter was not done with yet. Mrs. Stiffet, while refreshing a limited number of ladies and gentlemen who had supported her during the assault upon Mr. Fortescue, did not neglect herself, and having taken quite as much as was good for her, or to be strictly correct more than was good for her or anybody else, returned home in the venomous state of mind alcohol is famous for producing.

And in addition to venom she had gathered inconsistency, and having worked out the business of the assault, she was led to conclude, by the fallacious reasoning of strong drink, that the Haverlands were alone to blame for the disturbance.

It did not matter to her that she knew little or nothing of what had taken place within the house. It was enough and more than enough that she had found her residence, hitherto a model of propriety, a pattern to her neighbours, and an ornament to the district, almost in possession of an indignant mob, and a policeman on the front doorstep talking to a gentleman with a damaged hat and a flushed countenance.

"Anything so vulgar as that," she said, "I've never seen, and I'll have 'em out. Better no lodgers than such people."

She had never liked them. Instinctively her nature revolted against their refinement, and being in excellent condition for speaking her mind freely she wended her way upstairs and bounced unceremoniously into the room.

The poor, unfortunate people were in the midst of a frugal meal when she appeared, and her condition being unmistakable she was allowed to rave and rant until she was exhausted.

Fortunately her language was scarcely intelligible, owing to a thickness of speech, also arising from the morning's indulgence and hospitality, but she made herself plain when she came to a notice-to-quit that very day, and when at length the reaction came and she burst into tears Beaumont led her from the room and closed and locked the door.

"I don't know whether this is a fair specimen of the class of people we are to be thrown amongst," he said, savagely biting his lip, "but I for one have had enough of it."

"The woman is an undoubted exception," the colonel replied, "but it is sufficiently horrible to have run the risk of being associated with one like her. The question, my dear boy, is—what are we to do?"

"Leave her at once."

"Of course, but where shall we go to?"

"A lonely life in the backwoods would be better than this," Vida said.

"But it takes money even to emigrate," the colonel replied.

"We can get over," said Beaumont, determinedly. "Let us make up our minds to bear anything for a time. It will be only like running through a narrow river to a happy land above. Come—shall we emigrate? All who say Ay hold up their hands."

Vida and Mrs. Haverland, smiling, held up their hands, and, after a pause, the colonel did so too.

"We cannot be worse off," he said, "or have a worse prospect before us. But you must manage if all, Beaumont. I am played out. All my spirit has been quenched."

CHAPTER XXI.

LETTERS AND LEGACIES.

Morning came at last.

The eye looked out upon the watery world, With fearful glasses looked east and west, but all Was wild and solitary.

PAUL LEGARD passed a restless, almost sleepless night.

The interview rows and reproached a hitherto He felt that it of honour to a man known as a man

What is a man who is in and its beauty sweeter sympathy is a man of and yields to it If he is better sized as a man

It is the man and cynically and wails over of the world a gambler, and common lot of far as he knows

The man of feeling. It is long as he is is rich, who g He sees nothing social sins that at the man

Paul had a monstrosities pondering of the moonlight his nature th He had stooped peeped into falling into

How he lost weakness, w escape. Had no more peace

Some will Paul. Alas But we may if it has grofluence of a and women foot round selves up to

Paul slept the valet a in he awoke haste in his

He want "breakfast more."

He made t what he wotations, sad for ever. I that he got known behi that comes racking the and be at r

Dressing down to the too well in him. It w sunshine a was dark a down upon

Lois was upon the cl she turned knew that of renewing dead. It she smiled

"A cheer And s leave his r

"I am tating sli trespass lo have been my attent

"A sea Paul Lega He not voice, but of the fo

The interview with Lois awoke in him sorrows and regrets that scarce yet slumbered, and roused a hitherto unknown shame and remorse. He felt that he had fallen from his high estate of honour to the low level of that pitiful creature known as a man of the world.

What is a man of the world? In reality a man who is in it, but not of it. With the world and its beauty and its woes, its tender ties, its sweeter sympathies, he has nothing to do. He is a man of self, who cultivates self-indulgence and yields to the promptings of his baser nature. If he is better than that he is not what is recognised as a man of the world.

It is the man of the world who looks coldly and cynically upon the deluded girl who weeps and wails over a lover's falsity. It is the man of the world who sees in the life of the roué, the gambler, and the spendthrift, only types of the common lot of things that are, must be, and, as far as he knows or cares, ought to be.

The man of the world has sensation but no feeling. It matters not to him who suffers so long as he is at ease, who is poor so long as he is rich, who goes barefoot so long as he is shod. He sees nothing but what is natural in all the social sins that honeycomb society, and laughs at the man who moralises or weeps over them.

Paul had always entertained a horror of these monstrosities of creation, and as he lay awake, pondering on that interview by the window in the moonlight, he saw how much lay hidden in his nature that was in common with his fellows. He had stood on the brink of dishonour, had peeped into the gulf, and had narrowly escaped falling into it.

How he loathed himself as he thought of his weakness, while he struggled to rejoice over his escape. Had he fallen there would have been no more peace for him in this world.

Some will say there is no such living man as Paul. Alas for the world if there were not. But we may take heart. Honour is not dead, if it has grown feeble under the enervating influence of a strained civilisation. There are men and women left among us who would walk barefoot round the world rather than yield themselves up to baseness—but they are rare.

Paul slept a little towards morning, and when the valet appointed to attend upon him came in he awoke, unrefreshed and with a feverish haste in his pulse.

He wanted nothing, he said, and would "breakfast downstairs with Mr. and Mrs. Wadmore."

He made up his mind at the moment of waking what he would do. Haganhaugh and its associations, sad and sweet, must be left behind him for ever. It mattered little whether he went so that he got clear away, leaving all he had ever known behind him. He had upon him the thirst that comes to all who have a terrible anguish racking them, the thirst to flee away to solitude and be at rest.

Dressing himself without assistance, he went down to the breakfast-room—known to him but too well in the past—and found Lois awaiting him. It was a miserable morning. All the sunshine seemed to have left the earth, the sky was dark and sullen, and the rain was beating down upon the ground, falling steadily.

Lois was standing by the window, looking out upon the cheerless scene. Hearing his footstep she turned and met his grave, quiet look and knew that whatever hopes she might have had of renewing the scene of the past night were dead. It was gall and wormwood to her, but she smiled sweetly.

"A cheerless morning," he said.

"And scarce a morning for an invalid to leave his room," she replied.

"I am well and strong now," he said, hesitating slightly; "at least, well enough not to trespass longer upon your hospitality. I fear I have been neglecting many things that require my attention, and must leave you to-day."

"A scanty notice for one so considerate as Paul Legarde," Lois said.

He noted the bitterness in the tone of her voice, but dare make no reference to it. Not a step of the forbidden ground must be retraced, or

there was no knowing how far back he might go.

They sat down, and Lois, with a motion of her hand, gave him the choice between tea and coffee. He chose the latter.

"Mr. Wadmore, I presume, will soon join us," he said.

"I cannot say," Lois replied. "Mr. Wadmore is a little uncertain in his movements and does not like to have them questioned. I do not know if he has risen yet."

Again he felt they were nearing dangerous ground. But he had need of the presence of Cater Wadmore. He desired to meet his host and hostess once more on honest ground, and to part from both without mistrust, and that parting was to be final.

"As I leave early," he said, "and should like to see Mr. Wadmore before I left, I hope I may, without being unduly pressing, ask if he would be annoyed at my sending for him, or, at least, to know if he is likely to come down within the next half-hour."

"That is easily done," Lois said, half rising.

He saw her purpose, and arose quickly, saying:

"May I ring?"

With a slight bend of her head Lois resumed her seat, and he rang the bell.

"Is Mr. Wadmore rising?" she asked of the servant who appeared.

"Not yet, madame," was the reply. "Cranston has but just come down and says all is quiet in his room."

"Tell Cranston to let me know when Mr. Wadmore rings."

"He is not to be disturbed, madame?"

"Not yet awhile."

The servant left, and a few moments later Lady Lawstocke came shivering into the room. As she has risen quite an hour before her usual time, and on the previous evening expressed a desire to have breakfast in her room, her daughter was naturally surprised and expressed it.

"I have slept badly, Lois," she said. "The house seems chilly. There is no warmth in it, and in the winter will be unbearable. I should think. It used not to be so in the Haverlands' time. Oh, how do you do, Mr. Legarde? This is an unexpected pleasure. I feared you were confined to your room."

She glanced quickly from him to Lois and back again in a suspicious manner that was lost upon him and elicited a stare of anger and contempt from her daughter.

Paul handed her to a seat and helped her to some raised pie.

"I cannot think what has come to this place," pursued the old woman, glancing at Lois, but unheeding the frown she saw upon her face; "it has been very little changed, and yet one would think that there was a dead man or woman in every room to look at the place this morning."

"My mother has a powerful imagination, Mr. Legarde," said Lois, "and it is merely a question of good feeling whether she ought to give way to some of her peculiar fancies so early in the morning or reserve them for ghostly talk around the midnight fire."

"Such fancies as I have this morning I have never had before," the old woman said. "What a miserable morning. I would not be out in such weather for the wealth of the world."

"And yet there is a woman who is out for less," Paul said, with assumed lightness, "and a well-bred woman if there is anything in walking."

They followed the direction of his eyes and beheld a slim, graceful woman, wrapped from head to foot in a waterproof, coming across the park towards the house. She was too far away for her face to be distinguished, and in addition the hood of the one garment that was visible was drawn close.

"Who can that be?" said Lois. "The figure seems familiar to me."

"It may be one of the upper servants," suggested Paul.

"That is no servant," said Lady Lawstocke, who had been scrutinising the figure through

her double eye-glasses, "it is not unlike Mrs. Haverland."

"Can you not let those people alone?" said Lois, tartly; "they are gone from here, and it is as well that we should forget them."

Paul felt surprise if he did not show it, but he thought that Lois might only desire to restrain her mother's tongue for his sake. The approaching figure was now lost behind a huge buttress just without the window, and they returned to their breakfast.

Lois would have changed the subject, but Lady Lawstocke, with an obstinacy quite new in her when dealing with her daughter, persisted in renewing it.

"If such a thing as a ghost by daylight were not rather a rank absurdity," she said, "I should say that Mrs. Haverland is dead and her spirit has come to haunt us."

"I ask you, mother, to choose a more cheerful subject," Lois said, "the morning is oppressive enough without any extraneous help from you. Will you aid me, Mr. Legarde, to put her into a more cheerful mood?"

"Most willingly if I do so without fear of losing the esteem of Lady Lawstocke," Paul said.

"You will never lose that," replied the old woman, with a sudden intensity that startled him, "for you are the only man I know who is really great and noble. I heard one of the servants talking about your going away this morning. Is that true?"

"I purpose leaving by a mid-day train," he replied.

"That is right, go away. You cannot be too far away from here now. What peace and happiness can there be at Haganhaugh, seeing how it was gained and—"

"Mother!"

"Well, well, Lois, I ought not to talk against my own people. But it's a bad business, and I've dreamt of a sorrowful ending."

Something appeared to have upset Lady Lawstocke, for she had never been in this way before. There was a wandering look in her eyes and a trembling, uncertain movement about her hands as she took anything from the table. It seemed as if the infirmities of very old age had come suddenly upon her.

Lois dare not assume the offensive in the presence of Paul Legarde, for she valued his good opinion still, as she would have done if he had spurned her.

The love she bore him, base as it might be, was the small amount of gold in her nature so clogged with dross.

"You are not well, mother," she said, kindly; "it was wrong for you to leave your room. Let me lead you back to it."

"I'll not go," was the obstinate reply. "You want me to yield to you because you are afraid of me. But I am not going to say too much, although I could speak such things as ought to make you hide your head for evermore if shame is not quite dead within you."

Paul was inexpressibly pained, and knew not what to make of it.

Lois helped him to a decision in her favour by making signs expressive of a little derangement of intellect and a pitying sigh.

"Poor mother," she murmured, just loud enough to reach his ear, "we have feared it for a long time and now it has come at last."

What would have followed is uncertain, but just as Lady Lawstocke was beginning to speak again the door opened and the slight figure seen a few minutes before in the park entered. The waterproof was thrown back by an impetuous hand, and Mrs. Martingale stood facing Lois.

She either did not see or would not heed the other two, and what followed was entirely between the two young wives.

"You are surprised to see me," Mrs. Martingale said.

"Naturally," replied Lois, "the hour is very early for calling."

"It is about the same hour you appointed to meet my husband in secret."

It was a short and sharp shot, but Lois received it like an impenetrable person. She knew

there was evil in the early call and had her answer in a moment.

"I trust, Mrs. Martingale," she said, "that you have not come here solely for the purpose of insulting."

"I am here to tell you what you are, and to show you what you have roused in me. Woman, do you not know that my husband has left me?"

"How could I know he would so forget himself as to leave one in every way so fitted to be a sharer of his joys and sorrows?"

"You take things coolly, Mrs. Wadmore—but that I might have expected from one so base. I have your letter and I know you thoroughly. What woman, worthy of the name, would ask a man whom she has not known three days to meet her in secret and alone?"

"Go on, madame," Lois said; "I can bear all this and more."

"You must bear it," replied the injured wife. "Three days ago I had a husband who loved me, who had no thought apart from me and his little ones. He meets you journeying down here, and you, by acts that I know nothing of, lured him from me."

"You make me accountable for a foolish man falling in love with me?"

"I make you accountable for what you have done. I tell you, Mrs. Wadmore, that you made the first advance to my unhappy husband."

"Perhaps he, in a manly spirit, has told you so."

"He has told me nothing, but that he is broken-hearted and leaves me—covered with shame—for ever. He is gone—whither I know not at present—leaving me mistress of his fortune, reproaching no one but himself; and it is your doing. Does not this letter," she drew it from her pocket and held it out, "tell me who was the tempter and who the fallen?"

Lois, in a sudden fury, made an effort to snatch it, but Mrs. Martingale was too quick for her and restored it to her pocket.

"No, no," she said, "I shall keep that and publish it to the world. I will have no pity on you, for I am a woman wronged, with children wronged. I have been outraged in the tenderest depths of my nature, and I will punish you. I did not know until to-day that so fierce an anger could burn in the heart of living being as now burns in mine."

"In other words," said Lois, "you have lived all your life with the spirit of a little fury in you and never knew it."

"I know it now and that is enough. I would have kept the going of my husband hidden but that I knew it must reach your ears in time and you would laugh in secret. If you will laugh when I have done with you then you have more stoicism than man or woman ever yet possessed."

"It is well for you that we are not alone," said Lois, slowly, "or I would take that letter from you. It is nothing, although much may be made of it, only an appeal for assistance in an hour of distress."

"You are not one to appeal for it," was the reply, "for you are as bold as you are wicked. But I have told you. You are warned. I have done you that justice and you remain here at your peril. Do you hear?—at your peril. Ere a week has passed the whole county shall know what you are. I will plant a copy of this letter of yours in every house where it can be read and interpreted. The wrongs of my children shall be avenged."

It was almost impossible to believe that this woman, with a fierce spirit flashing from her eyes, could be the quiet, pretty little creature who met Captain Martingale at the station on the day he rode down from town with Lois. The cause of the change could scarce believe it.

And Lois quailed before her, for now she saw that the avenger was treading close upon her heels. She feared no man, but a woman could meet her in the lists, and with such a weapon as Mrs. Martingale carried crush her down. If her mother alone had been with them in the room that day she would have had that letter at any risk and any cost.

"You are a madwoman," she said, with a

last effort, "and will surely repent your rashness. Business that you know nothing of has called your husband away. Give me that letter and let us be friends."

Her hearer smiled and backed towards the door.

"If the giving up would save the lives of all I love you should not have it," she said, and drawing her cloak around her she left the room. There was silence until she was seen retracing her way across the park, and then Lady Lawstocke spoke.

"Lois," she said, "with all your sin and folly I gave you credit for possessing more wisdom. What a fool you are!"

Paul Legarde, who had sat in a semi-dazed state of mind, listening to what passed, now rose. He was very pale, more so than he had been since that hour when he stepped through the window and confronted Lois on the morning of his arrival, and there was an air of restrained courtesy upon him as he held out his hand.

"I must say good bye," he said, "and permit me to thank you for all the care and kindness I have met with here. I wish I had no other memory to take away with me, but, believe me, I wish you well."

"And you will leave?" she asked, piteously.

"At such a time as this," he replied, "there is only one man who can give you the support you need, and that is your husband."

He let her hand go, and it dropped to her side. Then he took leave of Lady Lawstocke, who muttered something unintelligible, and, with a shuddering in his soul, left the wretched pair.

As he was passing through the hall he encountered a servant bearing two letters on a tray. The envelopes were simply addressed and without stamps, and therefore could not have come by post.

"For you, sir," the man said, pointing to the more bulky of the two. "From Mr. Wadmore, sir. He has gone out, I think, sir, and must have gone last night, as his bed has not been slept in."

As Paul took the letter pointed out his eyes rested for a moment upon the other, and he saw that it was addressed to Lois.

"What can it all mean?" Paul mused, as he sauntered upstairs. "Has the man left here? and what can he have to say to me?"

With a dread upon him that it might have the same bearing as that which he had been murmuring to himself all the night long, Paul, with a heavy heart, sought his room and sat down in the chair he had accustomed himself to during his brief stay.

Taking the envelope from his pocket, he placed it upon the window-sill and regarded it as a nervous Japanese might look upon the missive from the Emperor to forthwith end this existence by means of the "happy dispatch." In all his life he had never known such a dread as there was upon him at that hour.

"I cannot read it here," he said, at last. "I must get far away where I can look upon the words that proclaim me false to the man who received me as a friend beneath his roof, for false I have been to all that is honourable and true."

He had brought little with him and he had little to take away. A small hand-bag held all that he had of his own, and, putting aside all else, he stole out softly by a private way he had often gone with Beaumont, and, regardless of the tremendous downpour of rain that increased in strength every minute, plunged into a shrubbery that offered to shield him from the house and directed his steps towards the station.

Meanwhile the attendant, bearing the letter for Lois, had appeared in the breakfast-room, where he was just in time to check a rising storm between mother and daughter. Clouds appeared in the horizon as soon as Paul Legarde was gone.

"I suppose you have been playing insanity for amusement," Lois said.

And her mother smiled quietly, but said nothing.

"Better have spoken out boldly," Lois went

on, "instead of mumbling and muttering and hinting. You could not have done more to ruin me than you have done already."

A lurid light gleamed in the eyes of the old woman as she turned upon her ungrateful child.

"Go on," she said; "you stepped upon the road to ruin as soon as you could totter, and the end is at hand."

Here the servant appeared, quiet and deferential, but with the words of Lady Lawstocke committed to memory for the benefit of the kitchen, where dark doubts were already being whispered about as to the fate of the new master and mistress of Haganhaugh.

"What is this?" she asked.

"It was found on Mr. Wadmore's table this morning, madame," the man replied, "about half an hour ago."

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Lois, and turning to her mother, she said, calmly: "I expected it. The paper I spoke of, you know."

But she had not expected it, and was troubled. The smooth-faced attendant was not deceived, and hurried away with a fine, fresh piece of gossip for his fellow-sufferers in over-fed, underpaid servitude.

"I wonder what mad freak he has on now," muttered Lois as she opened the envelope and read:

"MY DEAREST WIFE—Affectionate, at any rate—My dearest wife—I have left you to go upon a journey—A journey at this time! he is mad—to go upon a journey that will keep me some time from Haganhaugh."

"Mother, do you hear that?"

"Yes, yes, I hear it," said Lady Lawstocke, nodding her head sagaciously, "and I know where he is gone to, for I saw him go."

"You saw him go?"

"I did, Lois. He started—let me see—about three o'clock in the morning. I was restless, and, hearing his footstep, got up to see what he was doing."

"And you did not stop him?"

"Oh, no, it was not in my power to do so. I saw in his face that he would not listen to me."

With an impatient jerk, Lois straightened the letter, which she had been crumpling while talking to her mother, and resumed reading it.

"I have left something of great importance to you behind me, and, to keep it from the prying eyes of the servants, have put it away in the disused wardrobe in the picture gallery. When you have read this letter go at once for it, and go ALONE.—Your loving husband, CATER WADMORE."

"Stay here, mother," she said, "while I go and see what this mad husband of mine has left behind him. He has ruined our position here by his folly, and when he and I meet again I will settle scores with him."

Maintaining her usual proud, imperious air, she swept from the room, and ascending the stairs, entered the picture gallery—a sombre place on that dark and dismal day.

At the far end stood the wardrobe named in the letter—a huge, cumbersome article of furniture, with quaint carving on every part of its outer side. It was usually kept locked, but now the key was in it and the door stood slightly ajar. Swinging it open, she stooped down to peer into the dim recess, and there saw something that stopped the very pulses of her heart.

For a few moments she stood with upraised hands and distended eyes, and then fled back across the gallery, tossing her arms and calling aloud for help.

(To be Continued.)

The day before a Turkish girl is married she is taken to the bath by her lady friends and lumps of sugar are broken over her head as a forecast of the sweets of matrimony. A year or so afterwards her husband breaks the whole sugar-bowl over her head!

THE need of modern necessities of an eye, and kind of fabric, however, the lived in various instruments for this purpose were inhabited by the needles described as being made in opinion that the precision was which the

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NEEDLES.

THE needle is one of the most ancient instruments of which we have any record. The modern needle is a pointed instrument having an eye, and is used for carrying a thread, some kind of fabric, or other material. It is probable, however, that the needlers of those people who lived in very ancient times had no eyes, as instruments of bone, which were most likely used for this purpose, are found in the caves that were inhabited by ancient people of France, and the needles of ancient Egypt, which are described as being of bronze, do not appear to have been made with eyes. Some writers are of opinion that in place of the eye a circular depression was made in or near the blunt end, in which the thread was buried.

Pliny describes the needles of bronze which were used by the Greeks and Romans. These instruments have also been found in the ruins of Herouclaneum.

The first account that history gives of the manufacture of needles is that they were made at Nuremberg in 1730, and while the date of their first manufacture in England is in doubt, it is said to have been commenced in that country about 1543 or 1545, and it is asserted that the art was practised by a Spanish negro or native of India, who died without disclosing the secret of his process. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth this industry was revived, and has been continued ever since. Christopher Greening and a Mr. Damer established needle factories at Long Crenon, near Redditch, in England, in 1650, and these were soon followed by other London needle makers. Redditch is still the centre of English needle manufacture.

The eyes of the earliest needles were square. Many unsuccessful attempts were made to bring out the so-called "drill-eyed" needles before they were finally introduced in 1826. Two years later the burnishing-machine in which the eyes of needles are polished was completed. In this machine the needles are strung on a steel wire, which is caused to revolve rapidly and thereby impart a beautiful finish to the eye.

The process of hardening needles was for many years accomplished by casting them, while red hot, into cold water. By this means a large proportion of them became crooked, and the services of a large number of workmen were required to straighten them. In 1840 the substitution of oil in the place of water took place, and as this caused a large number of the workmen to be thrown out of employment, a riot took place at Redditch, and the introducer of the oil process was driven out of the town.

The machinery for making needles has now been brought to such a state of perfection that, from the coil of steel wire to the finished needle, the machines used perform their various operations in a manner that may be said to be almost automatic.

they were alone she treated Nellie more like a friend than a servant. In spite of the ignorance of her new dresser about all stage matters her mistress declared she had never been so well or so carefully dressed, and she was never tired of singing Nellie's praises to all who would listen to them.

Everybody about the theatre who came in contact with "Miss Smith" thought her a superior girl and wondered a little perhaps that she was in no better position. But there is so much business to be done behind the scenes of a theatre in full working swing that people have not much time to devote to any but their own concerns.

The straitlaced folk who preach about a theatre being a place of sinful pleasure, and liken it to a pandemonium by reason of the wickedness which goes on behind the scenes and in the green rooms, have very little idea how hard the work of a well-regulated theatre is, nor how little time for anything but the business of the stage there is at the command of anybody.

Miss Darlington's dresser was known by sight to most of the officials about the Wellington, but who she was and what became of her out of business hours no one seemed to know. She came and went quietly, sometimes under the convoy of Dan O'Callaghan, sometimes alone, and, as the stage manager emphatically declared, anent something that had gone wrong through the agency of a woman's tongue, knew how to keep herself to herself and mind her own business.

She heard a good deal about what was going on in the world through her association with the kind-hearted actress. Miss Darlington knew of her friends (or those whom she had called her friends in the happy days gone by), if she did not know them personally, and Nellie heard many a bit of news through the daily gossip that went on about the attractive actress.

She heard that the poor squire was still ill, and that Neville Delamere and his wife were not in good odour, and she saw them one night when the theatre was visited by royalty and Miss Darlington bade her look through a convenient spy hole and see the ever-popular princess and her sons. She saw them, but only for a moment, for not far off on the same tier sat her recreant lover and his wife. They were in a box by themselves and Vera's beauty and the blaze of jewels about her attracted the attention of nearly all the house.

She was magnificently dressed, rather too much adorned for good taste, and wore the triumphant look on her face that always made it look so hard and disagreeable. Neville was pale and seemed distraught—at least Nellie thought so. Involuntarily she compared him with the other man who she was sure loved her though he had never said so, and she asked herself how she could have been so blind as not to have seen how worthless Vera's husband was before he threw her off like a castaway glove.

She had only known Belton Leicester a very little while, but she had found his worth and divined his secret, and now that the meanness of Neville Delamere's character was exposed she wondered at herself and her blindness in trusting such a man with her life's happiness. As she looked at his listless, joyless face as he stood behind his wife in the box and gazed round the theatre with no sign of interest she almost thought her liberty well purchased, even at the cost of her home and position.

"I would not change places with her now," she said to herself just as a hand was laid on her shoulder and she turned to see Miss Darlington standing by her side.

"Well, have you gazed your fill?" she asked, kindly. "Does not the princess look nice? I think I will have my hair done like that to-morrow night. Did you notice it?"

Nellie had noticed nothing about the royal lady since the first glance and she turned a very white face to her mistress.

"What have you seen, child?" she asked. "You look as if it were a ghost you had been looking at instead of a live princess."

"So it was," she replied, in a low tone. "The ghost of my dead past."

The actress applied her eye to the hole and saw Mr. and Mrs. Delamere. She knew him by sight, but not his wife.

"H'm," she remarked. "It was a pity you looked. Is that the woman?"

"Yes."

"A bad woman, my dear—you will find it out some day. Do you know I have a notion that things will right themselves some time, and then it will be found she has no right to Milverstone?"

"Ah, no," Nellie said, shaking her head. "It is all too clear, the fraud was too palpable, so many people know of it. She might have behaved a little differently. I tried to be kind to her, but I bear her no malice."

"She is punished already, that's one comfort," Miss Darlington said as they went off to her dressing-room for a final look at the glass and sundry delicate touches for her next appearance before the audience. "I don't believe she's a happy woman, and I am sure he is anything but comfortable. Everybody cuts them."

She had kept her promise to Nellie and had not betrayed her knowledge of her to anyone, though she was sorely tempted to do so sometimes in writing to her friends. Through her Nellie obtained tidings of her aunt, or rather the lady she had always called so, and who had proved herself a true friend in the time of trouble, in spite of her crustiness and her inclination to meddle in the Milverstone affairs.

Lady Rivers had consented to Millie's marriage with a gentleman in business. His wealth was great, but his family were of the obscurest, and her ladyship, who was the daughter of a lawyer herself and consequently at liberty to consider herself of the aristocratic orders, had declared that the family dignity would be compromised by such a match.

Her husband had scouted the notion of inferiority from the first and laughed at his wife's notions. They could not live upon dignity, he said, and if Millie loved Mr. Hamilton he could see no reason why she should not marry him. He was a good fellow and well educated, a man who had made the most of his chances and was likely to rise further yet.

Lady Rivers suffered herself to be persuaded, and rather liked the opportunity the affair offered her to weave a little romance of the love phase of it, and to tell her friends that they really could not go against their darling child's inclination, and all the rest of the claptrap common to such occasions. People laughed at her and knew very well that the impetuous baronet was glad of such a chance for his daughter, and most young ladies envied Millie in their hearts her husband in the future and her magnificent settlement in the present.

Nellie was heartily glad to hear of Millie's good fortune, and still more to know that they had found a suitable wife for Darcie.

"They wanted him to marry me," she told Miss Darlington one night during the progress of the toilette. "I am thankful now for his sake that he did not, poor boy. His would not have been a very pleasant position now if I had been his wife."

"You would have been safe and sheltered from all the worry at any rate," was the kindly answer. "They could not have unmarried you come what would."

"You don't know Lady Rivers," Nellie said, with a smile. "She would have tried. Poor auntie—I shall never think of her as anything else, though I have no claim to call her so—she did want Milverstone so badly."

"And Mr. Rivers is going to marry a Gorgon of a woman with red hair and little tiny eyes," the actress said. "If he was ever in love with you I can't imagine how he can do it."

"He did not know what love meant, I verily believe," Nellie said, with something of her old sense of fun coming over her as she thought of Darcie and his awkwardness. "If you could only see him on his knees before me making love to me as his mother had bid him you would never have forgotten it. Poor Darcie, I hope he will be happy even with a red-haired lady. He was a nice boy then."

VERA'S VENTURE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"So Fair Her Face," &c., &c.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

A NEW LIFE.

Oh, fear not in a world like this,
And thou shalt know ere long—
Know how sublime a thing it is
To suffer and be strong.

LIFE was not altogether sad to Nellie in her new position, she might have done much worse than have accepted the position of dresser to Amy Darlington. The actress was an amiable girl and never in any way made her new attendant feel her position, and indeed when

"And he's a nice boy now, and never will be anything else, and the scarlet-haired woman has lots of money, so let us hope that his mamma will be consoled for the loss of Milverstone. My dear child, that wig's all asked."

Nellie had been away in thought to the old scenes, and had attended to her business badly for the first time. She hastily apologised and set matters right. She looked at herself in the glass after she had attended Miss Darlington to the wing, as was her duty, and wondered if indeed she were the same Nellie Rivers who had so lately been mistress of a great household and sovereign lady of Springfield.

She could hardly believe it, she was so rapidly settling down into her new life and so strangely contented to fill the humble place. But she was not to fill it long. Miss Darlington had a proposition to make to her, and she made it that very night.

"I want to talk to you," she said. "Come home with me—I will give you a bed."

Nellie had gone home with her on one or two occasions when she had had something she wanted done at her house. But she had hitherto resisted all persuasions to go and live in the house of her young mistress. At her own humble lodging she was independent. It was a poor place, but she could keep to herself. At home with Miss Darlington, no matter how kind she was, there would be the necessity of mixing in some degree with other servants, and Nellie shrank from any such contact more than she could have expressed. She preferred to be alone. Even kind-hearted Mrs. O'Callaghan grated on her sensitive feelings sometimes, and made her glad to escape to her own little attic, which had already begun to look, poor as it was, as if it were the abode of a lady.

"You are as difficult to catch as a wild bird," Miss Darlington said, when at length they were safely ensconced in her comfortable carriage and driving home. "You are going to have supper with me, and then listen patiently to all I have to say to you."

It was pleasant to be in a well-appointed carriage once more, and to sit down to a nicely-ordered table, with a neat maid in attendance, and Nellie let herself forget for the moment that she was a servant, and accepted Miss Darlington's hospitality as it was offered. She had been home with her once or twice before and had supped with her, but it had always been to discuss some new dress and take her orders for what was wanted for the business of the stage.

There was something else on her mind tonight and she went straight into it as soon as she had finished her supper.

"I have been thinking," she began, and then she stopped, and added suddenly, with a pleasant smile, "and I've quite made up my mind too."

"To what?" asked Nellie, seeing she was expected to say something.

"To discharge you from your situation, Miss Smith."

"Discharge me?" faltered poor Nellie.

"Have I not pleased you, Miss Darlington?"

"More than anyone else could possibly please me. I shall never have another like you."

"Then why?"

"Can't you understand?" the actress said. "Don't you feel that you are too good for the place—that you are worth something a thousand times better than the post of a lady's maid, for it's nothing better nor half as good? Now don't bounce like that," for Nellie had started up in dismay. "Just listen to what I want you to do. You can be of far more use to me in another way, and I can get someone else for the theatre."

"No one who would serve you half as faithfully," Nellie faltered, the tears standing in her eyes.

"No, of course not. It will be someone who is quite at home behind the scenes—you never were, my dear, and never would be—a woman who can take a glass of gin on an occasion, and who can hold her own, however much the people about the place may chaff and go on. You are far too good to be a servant behind the scenes of a theatre, and I want you to come and live here with me."

"As your maid? I thought—"

"That I had one already, so I have, a far better one than you will ever make, for I am terribly afraid of her, and I never should be of you. No, I don't want you for a maid, but for a companion."

"A companion?"

"Yes, a factotum in reality. I am a terribly careless creature, and I want someone to see that my papers stay in order when they are put straight, and that I don't pay the same bill twice over, and all that. You are far better educated than I am, and I shall be truly thankful if you will accept the office. I could not give you a very large salary, I have so many calls upon me, but you would have a home, and a happy one if I can make it so."

What could Nellie do but accept with tears of gratitude—it seemed to her, poor girl, as if a glimpse of Heaven were shown her in the proposal of the kind-hearted actress.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

A TRUE HEART.

Say thou love me while thou live,
I to thee my love will give,
Never dreaming to deceive
While that life endures.

It was a bright change for Nellie, from the dingy back attic in the house where the O'Callaghans lodged, and the dreary work of the monotonous days, to the bright, cheerful home of the lively actress, and to make it more enjoyable still she soon found that Miss Darlington had spoken nothing but the truth when she declared that she wanted someone to perform the duties she spoke of.

She was well enough cared for as far as a duenna went. She had a faithful old servant who had been her nurse in her babyhood, and who had left her home with her when she ventured upon the perilous career of the stage. If Nellie had admired her when she was only her dresser at the theatre and knew nothing of her personal affairs, she soon came to love her dearly when she understood the unselfish life she led and how she aided to keep the sorrowful home where her mother lay ill, an invalid who would never be anything else till the time came for her to step behind the lifted curtain of the "world within the veil."

"I daresay many people wonder why I am not at home nursing her," the actress said to Nellie one day when she had been talking to her about her mother, "but I can earn the money for her comforts, poor darling, and the others can't. Many a time when I am on the stage, and listening to the applause and the flattery, I would give all the money and the adulation to run home and have a sight of her. She longs for me and I for her; but if I were not what I am her last days would be days of privation."

Miss Darlington was said in the profession to be stingy and to be putting money away, but Nellie knew that she was sending it all home, and the tears came to her eyes often when she was shown the grateful letters that came to cheer the popular idol on her way.

The time when she was Nellie Rivers seemed very far off now. She was almost as well dressed as in the old Milverstone days, and she rode about in as well-appointed a carriage as she had owned then, and people looked at her sometimes and wondered where the pretty actress had picked up such a nice-looking companion.

Nellie performed her duties to everyone's satisfaction, even to that of the old servant, who at first was rather inclined to be jealous of her as an interloper.

But the newcomer filled her position very meekly and never gave herself airs, besides being so useful in every way. Mrs. Stephens, as she called herself, though she had never been married, was no hand at accounts, and blundered dreadfully over tradesmen's bills, and it was marvellous to her how Nellie made matters come right that seemed in a hopeless state of muddle, and set things straight that were

crooked, without any quarrels with the shop-keepers.

She was such a lady too, and spoke to people, she declared, as if they were flesh and blood like herself and not dogs, and Mrs. Stephens, like many old servants, stood greatly on her dignity. She had a vague idea that she had seen this "Miss Smith" before, and a chance word her mistress let drop one day confirmed her in the belief that the new companion was Nellie Rivers, about whose disappearance she had heard so much.

She kept her own counsel. It was not her place to speak, and she was a reticent woman by nature, until one night, when she had an adventure that might have ended disagreeably. Her mistress and Nellie had gone to the theatre together. Nellie very often went and sat in the dressing-room, doing little odd things that required delicacy of eye and hand, and Mrs. Stephens was left alone. Some trifling thing was wanted out of doors and she sallied forth to get it. John Street, Berkeley Square, is a quiet place enough, and one in which an elderly person might walk about without harm, but not many steps from her own door she was struck in the face with a "cat," well aimed by a boy who was playing with that delectable toy.

The young scapegrace decamped when he saw that she was hit, and she staggered blindly for a moment, and then slipped down in the roadway just as a passing cab was driving by. She was not actually much hurt by the blow, but she could not see where she was going for a minute, and she would certainly have been run over if a gentleman passing by had not rescued her and dragged her on to the pavement again.

"That was a close shave," he said, kindly, as he helped her to her feet. "Did you not see that cab?"

"No. I was hit in the eye with something—a stick I think."

"Ah, those abominable cats," the gentleman said, warmly. "When they have knocked out the Prince of Wales's eye, or hit the crown of the Queen's bonnet, they will be put down with a strong hand, I suppose. In the meantime peaceful folks are to suffer. You must let me see you home. Where do you live?"

"Close by—at 16A."

He gave her his arm, for she was giddy from the fright, and took her to the door. She would not hear of his going away till he had come in for a moment, and he was ready enough to do it, for he could not tell how much she was hurt.

"You must let me look at your eye," he said. "I am a surgeon. I can tell you what to do with it."

A very casual inspection satisfied him that there was no harm done, and he looked at the old woman with curious eyes.

"I feel sure I have seen you before," he said.

"I am sure I have seen you," was her reply, in a pleased tone. "How odd we should meet like this."

"You have the advantage of me. I cannot recall where I have seen you, and yet—"

"I don't wonder at your not recollecting me," she said. "You are Mr. Leicester, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you were at King's College Hospital seven years ago?"

"I was."

"I was one of your patients. I had a bad broken arm, and other injuries. I was knocked down and run over, as I so nearly was tonight."

"I think I remember. You were in the same ward with—"

He stopped suddenly. It was by the side of Lettice Gower's dying bed that he had seen this woman before, and she had seen his agony of sorrow and despair over her.

"Yes," she said, "by the side of that poor thing that died. I see you remember me now. You were very good to me then, and I hope you are doing well."

"Very well, thank you."

"In London?"

"No, at Springfield. You know Springfield?"

"Yes. We have heard a deal about that place lately. Queer things have been happening there."

"And queerer things will happen there yet, I think, but it is premature to speak of them. Mr. Blennerhasset is getting round again."

"Indeed. I'm thankful to hear it," Mrs. Stephens said. "I did not know him myself, but everybody knows of his goodness and kindness. What will he say to all that has come and gone?"

"He knows nothing of it as yet. He is constantly asking for Miss Rivers and she is not to be found. I dread to think what the consequences may be if we cannot satisfy him about her. He is so weak and so persistent in the matter that I sometimes think he must have some notion all is not right."

"And do you want to find her?"

"Surely I do. I have come up to town on purpose to make an effort. We seem to have tried every way. The police cannot help us. We know she came to London when she left Milverstone, but since then she might have been swallowed up by an earthquake for all that we can learn."

"Lord bless us!"

It was all Mrs. Stephens could think of to say in her amazement for a minute, and she stared at him as if she were going out of her mind.

"Can you help me?" he asked. "Do you know anything?"

"I don't know, I am not sure, but I think so. Surely Heaven must have sent you here this night to save me from being killed. I think she's here."

"Hush!"

"Yes, in this very house. I have never been told so, mind, but things have cropped up and I have heard chance words, and altogether I believe I am right."

"What do you mean?"

"She was dresser to Miss Darlington, and—"

"Dresser! she? Miss Rivers?"

"Yes, she was, if it's the same girl, and I am sure it is. But to be under Miss Darlington means being treated kindly and considerately. I can tell you. I fancy the mistress knows who she is, and has brought her here on purpose. She is her companion and now lives like a lady as she is."

"But where is she? You said in the house."

"She lives here. She is with Miss Darlington at the theatre to-night. You can get at her when you like. In about an hour from now you would be sure to see her. Miss Darlington will have done and they will be coming home."

"I hope it is as you say, I hope there is no mistake," Belton Leicester faltered. The room seemed to swim round with him as the old woman talked to him. Nellie alive and so near after all the weary time of waiting and despair! What if she were mistaken and it were someone else. The disappointment would be too keen, it would be more than he could bear.

"Is she known as Miss Rivers?" he asked.

"Lord no, sir, she's Miss Smith."

Miss Smith! the very name the railway porter said she had given at his mother's house. But there might be a thousand Miss Smiths and not the right one. Smith is a name everywhere to be found.

"I wish I could be sure," he said.

"Would you know her handwriting, sir?"

"Yes, that I should."

Nellie's hand was very peculiar for a lady, more like the hand of a copying clerk than a boarding-school miss, and was very characteristic of her strong, decided nature. Belton Leicester had often wondered at it and rather admired it for its singularity and firmness.

"Then I can show you some," Mrs. Stephens said, and left the room for a moment, returning with a little book in her hand.

"It's nothing private," she said, with a smile as she saw he hesitated to look at them. "They're only some receipts."

He took one of them in his hand and there sure enough was the writing he remembered so well, Nellie's clear, bold characters, and his heart gave a great leap as he saw on one page a letter crossed

out. She had been going to sign her name in an absent fit, and there was the "N" betraying her wandering thoughts. She had scratched it out with her pen, but he could see it, and he turned to Mrs. Stephens with tears of happiness in his honest eyes.

"You were right," he said. "It was the hand of Heaven that sent me here. Tell me how to get to the theatre. Which is it?"

"The Wellington, sir."

He hardly stayed to bid her good bye, but hailed a passing hansom and jumped into it, telling the man to drive as fast as he could to the popular theatre.

Mrs. Stephens looked after him in some perplexity.

"I hope I have not done wrong," she said to herself. "She may not want to be found. Well, I had no orders to hold my tongue; they should have told me and said it was a secret if they wanted it kept."

Mr. Leicester thought his cab the very slowest he had ever been in, and yet the horse was fresh and fast enough, and the man was driving at the top of his speed, incited by the hope of an extra fare. Presently he pulled up.

"What is the matter?" asked Belton Leicester, impatiently.

"Can't get any further, sir."

"Why not?"

"Road's blocked, sir."

"How?"

"Fire, sir."

"Where?"

"The Wellington, sir. It's all ablaze."

CHAPTER XL.

FOUND.

*The malediction
Of my affliction
Is taken from me, and my weary breast
At length finds rest.*

THE time had been going rapidly by since the changes at Milverstone. It was bright summer weather when Vera made her claim and Nellie went away, and the autumn leaves were only just beginning to tinge the woods when Neville Delamere brought the dark-eyed, haughty woman back as his bride.

The snow was lying on the ground in a soft white carpet when the alteration in the poor squire at Raybrook was first sufficiently apparent to justify Belton Leicester in suggesting the operation on which so much was to depend, and it was many weeks after that again before he thoroughly comprehended what had been happening in his absence as it were from the world.

"Where is Nellie?" had been almost his first question, and they had told him she was on a visit. His mind had been like that of a little child for a long time, hardly able to grasp anything, gathering strength as the days went on. It was fortunate perhaps that he had no idea how long a time had passed when he again asked for Nellie and was again told she was not at Milverstone.

He was able to sit up at last, and it was a joyful day for them all when he was moved to the fireside in an easy chair, and, dressed once more in his loose gown and velvet cap, he looked like himself, his wife declared, and he did as far as a man could look who had been into the very jaws of death.

He would get about in time, Sir Marcus Judd vouched for that, but the reaction after the period of insensibility had been long and severe and they were warned against anything that could agitate or depress him.

Mrs. Blennerhasset was in terrible trouble when he asked for Nellie.

"What shall I do?" she said to Belton Leicester.

"I dare not tell him. It would kill him."

"Will you leave it to me?"

"To tell him?"

"To do what I think best; I am not by any means sure that he does not know or guess that there is something wrong. I will not harm him with anything I say."

"I'll leave everything to you," Mrs. Blennerhasset said, almost with tears. "You have done so much that you may well do the rest, but you will take care, won't you?"

"Rest assured I will, he must know it sometime you know. We cannot always tell him she is on a visit. It has lasted a long time already."

The squire was beginning to get impatient, he could not understand what friends Nellie could be on a visit to at this time of the year. She had always liked to be at home at Christmas and New Year time, and in her father's lifetime there had been no thought of anyone going visiting at that hospitable season. Sir Darcie liked to fill his house with guests and to dispense benefits far and wide.

"Then her marriage was put off," he said to Mr. Leicester, only a day or two after the latter had promised to tell him the truth. "Put off on my account, poor child."

"She could not well get married while she did not know whether you would live or die, sir," the doctor said, gently. "She was too grieved and shocked to think of herself."

"Ah, well, there is no need for any delay now, I shall be at her wedding yet, please God. I wonder she stays away so. Is there no one at Milverstone?"

"Mrs. Downing and the servants, of course," was the hesitating reply. "It has not been a bright holiday time for any of us, Mr. Blennerhasset."

"Why not?"

He looked keenly in the face of Mr. Leicester and read there what he had been suspecting for longer than they had any idea of—that there was something to be told.

"Is the child dead?" he asked, presently. "Don't be afraid to tell me if she is, she would have been here to see me before this if she had been alive."

"No, she is not dead—at least, I hope in Heaven she is not—if I thought that, life would have very little left for me. She is lost."

"Lost—Nellie?"

"Yes."

"How? Nay, you need not be afraid to speak, I am strong enough now. Why is she lost—how has she disappeared?"

"The fraud has been discovered, sir. Milverstone has passed into other hands."

The squire put his hand to his head in bewilderment, and stared at Belton Leicester helplessly.

"I must be mad, or you," he said, "and yet my brain seems clear enough. What fraud? What was there to discover?"

"That she was not Sir Darcie's daughter."

"Who says it?"

The squire spoke quite calmly, there seemed no trace of agitation in his voice or manner, and yet Mr. Leicester was terribly afraid of what he was doing.

"Had you not better let it rest a little," he asked, "before I tell you any more? It has been a miserable business for us all—it has nearly broken my heart."

"Ay, lad, you loved her," was the quiet reply, "we saw it, and she had given her heart to that scamp who—"

"Who has married her successor, Mr. Blennerhasset."

"And who is her successor? Who has dared to insinuate that she is not what she claims to be?"

"The daughter of Sir Darcie's brother, the one who died—a lady calling herself Vera Rivers—she is Mrs. Delamere now. You may have seen her, though she had not declared herself at the time of your accident."

"Vera Rivers?"

"Yes."

"And she has dared to put in a claim to Milverstone?"

"And to get it. She is mistress there now, and the other—Nellie—is, Heaven knows where, an outcast—a wanderer for aught we know. We have done all we could to find her without success."

"But on what, in Heaven's name, does that woman found her claim? On what grounds?"



[THE ACTRESS'S TOILETTE.]

"On some letters which she found while she was in the house as a sempstress—mainly a letter from Lady Rivers to her husband acknowledging that she had committed a fraud in foisting the child Nellie upon him as their own."

"Did you see the letter?"

"No, but Mr. Venables acknowledged it to be genuine."

"Venables! The world must have turned upside down. Lady Rivers did not write that letter, he knew that as well as I did. What can he have been thinking of?"

"You know of the letter then?"

"I know of a letter, but it was not from Lady Rivers, and I thought it had been destroyed long ago. And she—the actress girl—has dared to hatch such a plot as you describe? Who has aided her in it?"

"She had a lawyer, a Mr. Shackleton. He seemed honest enough in the business, Mr. Venables said he was a man well known and respected in the profession."

"I cannot understand it. And they drove Nellie out, you say?"

"No. I will do Mrs. Delamere that much justice, she did not, and she was much troubled at her going. The poor child overheard something, and ran away from the home she thought she was usurping. We tracked her to London, and there all trace was lost."

"You must find her, Mr. Leicester, she must be brought back. She and no other is mistress of Milverstone. I cannot understand by what jugglery all this has come about, there must have been fiendish plotting. But we will unmask the tricksters, you and I. Find my girl for me, Mr. Leicester, and we will put her back in her old place."

"Are you sure you can do this, sir?"

"I wish I was as sure of Heaven," the squire replied. "But let things be till you have found her; if you do not— But I will not anticipate such a thing, I should doubt the justice of the Almighty if I did."

"If I do not," and the young man's face took a heartick expression at the mere thought

of such a thing, "I say, supposing such a calamity, what would become of Milverstone—would it be that woman's?"

"No, a thousand times no!" Mr. Blennerhasset said, eagerly. "It would go to the rightful heirs, Sir Wilfred and his family, they would be the owners in that case."

"But Mrs. Delamere claims to be the daughter of the elder brother and so steps in before them."

"Granted; but you shall see her walk out of Milverstone and her precious husband for all that. Look here, Mr. Leicester: find our Nellie for us and we will think nothing too great to do for you in return. Don't spare the money in the search, remember you have my purse at your disposal to pay for someone to do your business here and all that may be wanted anywhere else. Nellie must be brought home."

"She shall if she is alive."

"And she shall reward you in her own fashion; when that happy day comes you will know how best to win her."

"Don't," Belton Leicester said, in a tone of pain. "If this horrible thing had been true and she had been an outcast I would have done my best to deserve her love; if I find her, as Heaven helping me I will, it will be to rejoice in her happiness and to say good bye."

"Ah, well, all that will right itself," the squire said, "the thing is to find her first; and look here, sir: let all we have said be a secret till she is found and here on the spot to give that impostor the lie. I will explain myself then, I can do it, and the enlightenment shall be sharp and brief, I can promise them."

It seemed as if the excitement, instead of doing the squire any harm, had roused him to new energy, for he was better and brighter from that evening, and when Belton Leicester called the next day, fearful of finding him worn out and ill, he was agreeably surprised to see him cheerful and hopeful and anxious for him to be gone. He promised to start at once and to keep Mr. Blennerhasset informed of all his doings as time went on.

With more means at his command he felt more hopeful of success, though the very thought of success and seeing Nellie installed again at Milverstone brought a pang with it—it would only be as he said to say good bye to her. He could not woo her as the mistress of the Grange, it would seem as if he were asking her in repayment for what he had done, and she would feel bound to accept him for the service he had rendered her.

He met Mr. Delamere on his way to the station, and that gentleman, ill at ease as he always was now, stopped him to ask for news of his uncle.

"Is it true that he is getting well?" he asked.

"Quite true."

"And able to understand things?"

"He understands all about the changes at Milverstone, if that is what you mean," was the quiet reply. "He fully comprehends your wife's claim and the justice of it, Mr. Delamere. I have a train to catch, you will excuse me wishing you a very good morning, I am late now."

"What does he know, I wonder?" Neville Delamere said to himself, as he walked away in no very pleasant frame of mind—Belton Leicester's words had sounded terribly ominous. "I wish I could persuade Vera to sell the musty old place and go abroad, we should be out of the way of all these confounded worries on the Continent. But she is self-willed, is my handsome wife, and nothing will turn her when she has made up her mind."

Belton Leicester went his way to London, to hear of Nellie on the very first night of his stay in town, and to follow her to a theatre which was already doomed. Fire was pouring from the doors and windows of the Wellington as he pushed his way through the crowd that surrounded it and inside the cordon of police that guarded the stage door; Nellie was inside, and while they looked on her life might be paying the forfeit of somebody's negligence.

(To be Continued.)

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[FIERY INDIGNATION.]

A DOUBLE ENGAGEMENT.

(A COMPLETE STORY).

CHAPTER I.

AN INTERESTING ARRIVAL.

PERHAPS I may be charged with a little egotism in the story—the ONE story of my life—I am about to tell, and I plainly admit there is just a little of that popular musical performance known as blowing one's own trumpet, but I think I am entitled to exoneration on the grounds that victory is an intoxicating thing, the alcohol of the soul, and intoxicated people, as a rule, have their misdeeds viewed with a lenient eye.

The truth is, I have been engaged in a love-fight (rather paradoxical that, eh?) and have won the day. Mine enemy has come to grief, not only being routed, but disabled for the rest of her days. I doubt if she will ever be able to fight again.

In a physical sense, we people of Cuddleton are a peaceable people. My father, the rector, is a most peaceable man; my brother Harry would not hurt a fly if he could help it, and the beer sold at the inn has been so trifled with in the matter of malt and hops that intoxication rarely follows the drinking.

Our one policeman having nothing to do, is so constituted that if it were possible to have less than nothing to employ his time he would rejoice—adipose matter has collected on his bones to such an extent that, at the time of our yearly revels, he is urged by showmen to “turn up” the force and go in for a gentlemanly life in a booth as the “fattest man in Europe;” and of the people generally I can only say that they are the coziest, rosiest, and—in a whisper I give you this—the laziest body of people in the wide world.

There are only two families—“swell” families—in the place. One is at the rectory and is MY

family, and the other lives in the White House, and bears the name of Marajack.

They lay claim to being a branch of the Marajacks who are in high places all over the world, ruling the swarthy tribes abroad as governors, commanding armies, and pulling the political ropes at home. So they may be, but I have fought with the pride of our Marajacks—the eldest girl—and I have worsted her.

Bella and I used to be great friends. We were, in fact, seldom apart, and any time of the day, when the weather was fine, you might have seen us pegging about the village, hopping into the school, visiting the sick, worrying the old men and women with tracts, and doing all sorts of kind offices appertaining to the influential residents of a village.

All went well until Hanley Peverill came down to our village, ostensibly to fish our purling stream—reputed to be “stiff” with trout, like the famous waters of Ireland—but I saw in an instant that the fishing was a blind—Hanley wanted a wife. Bella saw it too, and, in the most indiscreet manner, we confided in each other.

“A more marrying-looking man I never saw,” I said, “and father says that he is rich and has a splendid place in Lincolnshire. He called on him this afternoon, and he is going to dine with us to-night.”

“How very odd,” Bella replied. “I too saw hovering about him the beautiful halo of matrimony. My father called upon him to-day also, and he dines with us to-morrow.”

There could only be one end to a confidence of this nature—an explosion. Bella and I were always frank with each other, and we spoke our minds pretty plainly before we parted. She called me a husband hunter, and I said I was proud to hunt such a noble animal as man. Then I called her a matrimonial gamester, and she said there was no sin in gambling when there was nothing to lose and a husband and a fine estate to win.

We made no secret of our rivalry, but we would not work together. Bella and I gave up gushing friendship and went in for icy acquaint-

tance. We gave no smiles and kisses when we met, and put in their place grim frowns and distant bows.

Hanley Peverill came to dine with us, and we took good care to have all the little ones in bed before he appeared. I was sorry when I saw him that I had concocted a plot against his liberty and peace, for he was so nice, so handsome, so gentlemanly, that it seemed a sin and a shame to plot against him at all.

At dinner there was my father, the Reverend Pelham Howe, my mother, Harry, and Hanley, and a very pleasant little party it was too. Hanley was as much at home as if he had known us from his birth, and he paid me so much attention that I was quite ashamed of myself for having thought of him before he came.

How much nicer it would have been if I had waited and let him first think of me, but—beigho!—people will make geese of themselves and mar the brighter sides of their lives with little petty meannesses.

In the middle of the dinner an event occurred that brought out the man and made me like him all the more. I had to exert all the resolution of my nature to keep from kissing him. I do not tax that resolution now. But do not let me anticipate.

My youngest brother Tom, aged four, is the pet and spoiled darling of us all, and to him I had confided the news of a stranger coming to dinner, urging upon him the necessity for going to sleep early and keeping quiet.

Tom was put to bed, but he could not sleep. A feverish desire to see the guest kept him awake, and, after battling with his desire, he yielded to it, and, coming quietly downstairs, marched into the dining-room with the entrées, a cherub in a night-shirt—if ever there was one.

“Oh, Tommy!” I exclaimed, jumping up horrified, “how could you be so naughty?”

“Come ‘oo see Misser Pummell,” replied Tom.

And having the family confidence already in a promising stage of development he dodged me

and ran towards Hanley, who laughingly caught him in his arms and hoisted him upon his knee.

"You must let him remain a little while," he said. "I am awfully fond of children. I often have a child's party at my place."

We were afraid at first that he was only tolerant of a nuisance, as guests often are, but his pleasure in Tom's society was genuine, and when at last it was imperative that Tom for his health's sake should return to his couch he looked quite sorry.

Tom backed him up too. He would not go to bed again unless "Misser Pummell" carried him there, so Hanley hoisted him on his broad shoulders, and I lighted the precious pair upstairs.

He tucked Tom in as kindly and gently as a woman would have done, and as he and I went downstairs together he said, laughingly:

"I have made a new friend, and one I value. I hope to see much of him during my stay."

I acknowledged his appreciation of Tom in a few suitable words, but I did not ask him to come again—that was a matter that rested with my mother, to whom I repeated what he had said after we had left the gentlemen over their wine.

She decided upon bidding him make the rectory his temporary home, and he gave the opening desired by asking if he might call occasionally to see his young friend.

"I shall be here quite two months," he said, "as it is my intention of catching every fish that is worth catching here."

While he was talking in this way he was looking at me. I wondered when I had a few moments for thinking whether he thought me a fish worth angling for.

There is only one thing more to record about that night, which in itself is of no great importance, but as it bears upon the rest of the story I give it here: I had just been singing, and Hanley was telling me that my voice reminded him of one he had heard in Italy, when Harry broke in upon our chat.

"By the way," he said, "I have some news for you. The haunted house is let."

My father, who had taken up the "Church Magazine" to cover a short nap, woke up with a start; my mother abandoned a book of engravings, and we all looked at Harry with surprise.

"The haunted house let?" my father exclaimed.

"Yes, and to-morrow it is to be put into the hands of Birchell," Harry replied. "He has orders to do it up thoroughly."

"After being thirty years empty," my mother murmured.

"Is that the old building opposite the White House?" asked Hanley.

I bowed assent.

"And why is it haunted—or rather why reputed to be?" he asked.

"Mainly because it has been empty so long," I said. "A miser lived and died there, I believe."

"He died a year after I came here," my father said. "I was a curate at the time and had the sad office to sit by him in his last moments. His death was awful. His great grief was that he had to leave his money behind him, and it was only seven hundred pounds stowed away in the chimney."

"Who has taken the place?" I asked.

"Some fellow named Danvers," Harry replied, "and he only wants it for a box. They tell me he is rich."

"Danvers—Danvers?" my father said. "Carrie, give me Debrett."

We always kept a Debrett in the drawing-room on the table, and I was moving toward it when Hanley did the office for me. My father thanked him and turned to the letter D.

"Danvers," he murmured. "Ah! here we are. There are two families with no end of branches. Perhaps he is a Danvers of Crompton—but of the younger sons."

"But we don't know his age," I suggested.

"Oh! he is young—not more than thirty,

that much I know," Harry said. "Birchell has seen him and says he is a perfect gentleman."

"Birchell judges gentlemen occasionally by their purse," I said. "He made a mistake about that bagman who came down to town for his holidays."

"So did we," Harry said, "but he talked art and we thought he was a painter—a Bohemian, you know—but it turned out that he was a traveller for a print-seller. We asked him to dinner here, and after dinner he asked for an order for the re-issue of Martin's Plains of Heaven. He also brought out a catalogue of what he called 'clerical subjects.' I don't think I shall forget that night in a hurry."

We all laughed—Hanley included.

"Some of these travellers are gentlemanly fellows," he said, and the subject dropped.

He was kind and charitable in his conversation, and that seemed to me to be an index to his heart. A most delightful evening was spent, and the only cloud upon it was at parting.

"I shall not be able to see Tommy to-morrow," he said, "as I am going to try the upper river here, and I dine at the White House in the evening. You are very hospitable people at Cuddleton. I do not know where I have enjoyed myself so much. Tell Tommy that I will look him up early—the day after to-morrow."

CHAPTER II.

THE OCCUPANT OF THE HAUNTED HOUSE.

The next day was a gloomy one for me, but I bore up pretty well during the early part of it—when I knew that Hanley was away fishing; but as the evening grew nearer I became fidgetting and miserable, and had a vision of Bella using her little arts to secure him continually before me.

Bella was pretty, and is pretty still—I don't deny it and never have done so; but I think she has a face of which one soon tires. You know what I mean. At first it is extremely pleasing, then it grows commonplace, and finally you dislike it. That is how I found it, and I tired of it at the time that Hanley came among us.

I was glad when that day was over, and went to rest about eleven satisfied that Hanley must have left the White House by that time, and looking forward to seeing him on the morrow, for, of course, his visit to Tom would include us all.

Some may think that I am a little forward in my ways. Let me undeceive them. What I felt I did not show to Hanley then, nor would have done for many months if—but I must not anticipate; it spoils a story to keep rushing into anti-climaxes. All the interest is gone when you know the finish. Perhaps you think you know the finish of this. Read on, and perhaps you may find yourself mistaken.

No, I am not forward, and never was, and I am only honest in speaking as I do now. If women generally would be candid, four-fifths of them would tell you that they have at least once in their lifetime had such dreams after the first meeting with him as I had as soon as I knew Hanley Peverill.

He came to see Tom and stayed to luncheon. In the afternoon we all went into the garden, and he and Harry had a cigar, while mother and I knitted, and father read one of those tooth-aching-looking books he has upon the ecclesiastical shelf of the library.

Hanley did not talk about the people of the White House, which I thought was a bad sign, but devoted himself mainly to Tom, who was never tired of romps, and revelled in being tossed up and down like a doll dancing on wires.

We had tea upon the lawn, and then Hanley left, taking with him what little of my heart he had left behind him two days ago. There was no denying the stern fact—I was in love with him, and without knowing how much love he had for me.

He had enough, I was sure, to be called a

strong liking, but what same woman was ever satisfied with a liking? Much better have a man's hate, for that can be turned upside down into love, while a liking is like a round stone—cold and hard and the same thing to look at from every point of view.

Could I have been guilty of so mean a thing as spying on a friend I should have followed him to see if he called at that odious White House. It was only half past four and a call would have been en règle.

Bella and I met the next day. I called on one of our stock invalids—old Martha Green, who suffered from rheumatism and cold on the chest alternatively. If she had not one she had the other, they went up and down like a seesaw, and it was an accepted theory that she would live on for ever unless she got both together. Then her time for the enjoyment of this world would be over.

Being pent up in a small room in a cottage, we could not avoid speaking. It is true one of us might have left, but I stayed to let Bella know that the sick people belonged to the rectory, and she kept her ground, I fancy, to let me know she was as good as we were.

"A fine day," she said, curtly.

"Very fine," I replied, stiffly.

"I hope you found Mr. Peverill good company the other night. We are all delighted with him," she said.

"Nobody could be more agreeable than he has been to us," I returned.

Here we were relieved by old Martha giving vent to a groan—the rheumatism having caught her in the neck of time to save us from smothering Hanley in eulogies. We both consoled with her, read a little to her, one after the other, and gave her a trifle—Bella's trifle being a trifle better than mine.

Then we called out together, and parted in the road with a stiff bow.

The next day or two were days of rest. Hanley was away fishing from morning till night, taking advantage of weather particularly favourable for the destruction of the finny tribe. Our river, however, was not so well furnished with trout as it might have been, or the trout were peculiar fish, on which the favourable weather had no effect.

Hanley told us as much when he came on the following afternoon and sat with us in the drawing-room with Tom on his knee.

"I have fished the water from end to end of the estate round here," he said, "and the result is not inspiring. I shall fish here no more."

"Are you going away?" I asked, my voice sounding quite small.

"No, I think not," he replied, after a moment's consideration. "I like the country here, and am as fond of walking or riding as I am of fishing. I think of having a couple of horses down. Nobody seems to ride much here."

"We cannot afford to keep more than poor old Wiggles," my mother said. "He was warranted to ride or drive, and he is perfectly safe in both until you try to lift him out of his settled jog-trot, and then he is likely to fall."

He smiled because we did, but straightened circumstances in others did not seem to amuse him as it does some people who have plenty of money. I thought I saw a glance of kindly intent in his eyes, and I know now that he admired our candour.

"The Marajacks talk of keeping a pair," he said, simply; "they seem to be very nice people."

"We have always been good friends," my mother said, and I, after a struggle with an inward storm, added:

"Bella, the eldest, is a nice girl, and we used to be great friends."

"I hope you are so now," he said. "I think Miss Marajack is very amiable. She paints well too."

I could have told him about these paintings, done as mine were at school, and touched up by an unscrupulous teacher, but I would not. I set my lips firm and held my peace. If he were spoons on Bella it were better that he went on until he found her out.

Only I wished him to find her out BEFORE marriage, afterwards I should not be much interested in the discovery.

Nothing of any great importance transpired for a week. Hanley visited us and the White House too like a bee hovering from flower to flower (a cool idea comparing oneself to a flower, isn't it? but now-a-days it is quite legitimate), and would decide upon neither. At the end of that time the haunted house became occupied.

A London upholsterer furnished it, bringing everything down and fitting up the whole ten rooms of the house in something under four hours, suppling everything from a wardrobe to a toasting fork, and I am not quite certain that he did not supply the three servants, a cook, housemaid and gardener, who appeared simultaneously with the furniture.

The village was alive with curiosity and we caught the infection. Harry put on a casual air, hovered about until our new neighbour came by train and was driven to his house by the one fly belonging to the inn.

"He is a good-looking fellow," Harry reported "with a cool, collected air about him. I should say he was all right."

"A Danvers of Crompton," the rector said. "You must call on him, Harry, to-morrow and take my card."

Accordingly on the morrow Harry got himself up in a walking suit reserved for special occasions and paid his visit. He came back a little puzzled.

"A nice fellow enough," he said, "but I don't quite know what to make of him. He is reserved and does not seem anxious to have society. But he is not at all embarrassed and he talked of some swells in town in a way that was unmistakable."

"A Danvers of Crompton," père said, emphatically, and we lay in wait for him to return Harry's call.

Hanley was with us when he came, and he and Hanley did not "mix." Our new neighbour was a man still young, and with passable features, regular but not handsome. His eyes were a little too close together and his lips a little more compressed than I care to see, and I will vow that he dropped more than one h. But on the whole he was not positively objectionable.

We discussed him a little when he was gone, but Hanley did not join us. Not a word, good, bad or indifferent, fell from his lips until he and I were in the garden alone.

How we got there away from everybody else I cannot tell, but there we were with our Tommy, who was a most devoted friend to Hanley and never left him without infantine protest of a very pronounced description.

By degrees a confidential way of talking had grown up between us, and I occasionally confided to him little troubles of mine, such as the affliction my pet rose-tree was suffering from. That poor tree was quite alone at the bottom of the garden, but all the green flies found it out and did their best to establish a colony of the destructive aphids on every spray.

We had gone down to look at that tree and were examining it with interest when Hanley suddenly spoke of Mr. Danvers.

"I do not like your latest neighbour," he said. "It is something new for you to dislike anyone," I said, a little drily. "You are so friendly with EVERYBODY."

I meant this to be a slap at his devotion to the Marajacks, but it fell short or was not even seen. He took no notice of it and accepted my words as a compliment.

"Thank you," he said. "I hope I try to cultivate good will in the proper sense of the term, but I do not like this man. There is something behind the scenes. He is an impostor in some way."

"Surely you do not mean a swindler," I said. "No. A swindler would not settle down in a barren land. If he ran away with the whole village it would not keep him for three months."

I made a little courtesy and thanked him "for joking at our poverty," adding the stock phrase "Poor and content is rich and rich enough."

"I only alluded to the shopkeepers," he said, apologetically, "who are generally the victims of the professional swindler. I do not think the man is that, still he has come here for a purpose. I would have you all be wary in dealing with him."

A thought, a joyous thought, flashed upon me. Was it possible that Hanley was jealous of the coming of this man? Mr. Danvers was not positively hideous, he was rich and he had paid some court to me, and if Hanley did care for me was it not natural that he should feel the green-eyed monster's sting?

I thought I would try a woman's tactics and praise the man a little.

"Mr. Danvers has a quiet way with him," I said, "and means if possible to make himself agreeable. We have too little society to throw anyone away."

"Oh, don't throw him away," said Hanley, "until you find he is what I expect him to be. But don't let us waste time in talking about him. See here is one pretty rose unspoiled."

"Thanks to your care," I said; "you removed the destructive element from it yesterday."

"Is that the rose?" he asked.

"The same."

"May I have it?"

"Who so great a right to it as you?"

"Will you give it to me?"

"Freely. Take it and welcome."

"No. I mean will you give it to me? Cut it from the tree yourself. I have my knife here."

We were not looking at each other, and both were a little flurried. I bowed to signify that I would cut the rose, and as he handed me the open knife our hands came in contact. His fingers closed on mine.

"Be careful," I said. "The blade of the knife is open."

"We had better drop that," he said, and the knife slid down through the rose-tree to the ground, where it lay neglected and forgotten, while Hanley and I glided into the sweetest little talk I have ever known.

Never before have I had such words poured into my ear, and never again can the same words have such a charm for me. Once, only once, is the ear so sensitive to the whisperings of—love.

Yes, love, for he told me that day such things as you must guess at, and I believed him with all my heart and soul; and as I am a woman I had no thought of all the rare wealth he owned as I stood by the rose-tree supported by his strong arm, while my head lay on his broad, manly shoulders.

"My love, Carrie, began when first we met," he said. "I have let it grow and grow until, as the ivy twines about the tree, it holds me in a firm embrace from root to topmost branch, and, like the tree thus enveloped, I have lost an old life and gained a new one. Take you away, Carrie, and I am nothing."

Sweet words from such lips to woman's ears, and never were words sweeter to woman than those were to me.

CHAPTER III.

BELLA ENTERS THE LISTS.

It was about half-past four, as near as I can guess, when Hanley and I left the rose-tree to look after itself, and returned to the vicarage to tell our story—I to my mother and he to père. Hanley for some unaccountable reason dreaded that interview. Latterly I have discovered that feeling to be common among lovers.

You see it is the last obstacle to be cleared away. Parents may object, and generally do when they have good reason for it, and no lover believes himself worthy of the woman he seeks to espouse. If he does he is no lover.

At half-past four we knew our fate. There was no objection to the match at home, and at five o'clock all the village had learnt of Hanley Peverill coming down to Cuddleton to fish.

"They will say that he has caught a trout indeed," Harry said to me in a whisper, and I

boxed his ears, but did it ever so gently, as boxing the ears of the young is now admitted to be dangerous, and a strong provocative to deafness.

What the village said behind my back I can only guess at, but to my face they all expressed delight. What was said at the White House I never knew. Bella did not come out for two whole days, and when she did appear there was a fictitious gaiety in her looks and a forced elasticity in her step that made me sorry for her.

We met and she actually congratulated me. "I hope you will be happy," she said, "and I have no doubt you will, if you can put up with a man who has been a general lover."

I knew what she meant, but I declined to notice it, and answered her in a friendly spirit. Four days afterwards we gave a dinner party, and Mr. and Mrs. Marajack and Bella came. We also asked Mr. Danvers to balance Bella in a social sense, as Amy, the next girl to me, was brought out of the schoolroom as soon as I was engaged and introduced to society. Harry, however, was sufficient balance for her, as she was too young to think of a lover.

We formed a very pretty little party of ten, and by the way Bella went on with Mr. Danvers I saw that she had been having a confidential talk with him before. They were the warmest friends on so short a notice I have ever seen except Hanley and myself.

One little confidential chat we had together while we were arranging our music for after dinner, and it was about lovers, beginning in a general sense and becoming decidedly personal at the finish. I shall record the finish only.

"You are fortunate, my dear Carrie," she said, "but you have not got the only prize."

"You hope to draw one yourself," I replied, good-humouredly.

"A prize worth having," she replied, "not one that anybody might have had if they had only tried ever so little for it."

I did not like this repetition of a slur upon the love of Hanley, for two reasons. First because it was thrown upon a man I loved, and second because I was not quite sure how much truth there might be in it. If he had indeed been making love to Bella, I should be very angry with him if nothing more.

Had she been open in her declaration I should have known what to do, but she did not come forward with anything positive about him or herself. She implied that he had shown himself devoted to her, and that was all. As a woman I was too wise to enter into a quarrel with implication for a background.

Still I was uneasy, and it was on my lips to speak to Hanley when we were together, but happily I checked myself in time. I am glad now I did not insult him or dishonour myself by taking such a course.

Ere the evening was over I was certain that Bella was making fierce love to Mr. Danvers, who, as far as I could see, had a deal of the moth in his nature and wilfully fluttered about the dangerous flame. I never saw a man so readily lend himself to the allurements of one of my sex. It appeared to me that he could see the danger and yet gladly rushed into it.

Well, in three days there was a whisper of these two coming together, and in a week an announcement of their engagement was out. Everything was satisfactory. Mr. Marajack of course asked for a settlement, and one was promised—a reference to a banker showed that Mr. Danvers was a man of considerable property, but who he was exactly nobody knew.

The double engagement was almost too much for the village, and all the old women were like bees disturbed in their hive, and went buzzing about all over the place.

Old Martha Green laid aside her ailments and arrayed herself in a cap and ribbons that had not seen light for thirty years, and showed herself beaming like an ancient May moon at her door.

She stopped all passers-by and talked over our good fortune with more freedom than discretion.

To me she meant to be very complimentary.

"The last parson, miss," she said, "had eight daughters, and nary one went off, and I never thought you would go, but Good Luck came and dropped his handkerchief at your door."

She asked herself to my wedding, saying she would come to the kitchen and help, and I left it an open question for the time, well knowing what our cook would say to that. If she did allow me to interfere the fate of Martha coming to help was not in the least doubtful.

Bella hurried her marriage on, I am sure she did, for she wanted to be the first to lay aside her maiden name.

In a quiet way she warred with me, and I let her go on. What mattered it to me?

Hanley and I were very happy, and if we occasionally discussed the other happy pair it was in a light and cheerful and charitable vein. But Hanley had never believed in Mr. Danvers, and nothing could better his opinion of him.

"I am glad he is rich," he said; "the girl will never want, but will never be happy with him. I wonder if she loves him?"

"Not as I—love you," I said, and was quite certain that I spoke nothing but the truth.

The impending alliance made the Marajacks stiffer than ever. They had always been proud and now they were bordering on the arrogant.

Bella hastened events, as I have told you, and before a stitch had been set in my wedding-dress, ay, before we had chosen the material, she had everything complete, and Mr. Rugby Danvers was ready for the sacrifice.

They garlanded him with roses, in a metaphorical sense, and put a halo of aristocratic birth and breeding about him, hinting at his being nearly related to the head of the house of the Crompton Danverses, with the possibility of his eventually taking the head of that great family.

I may as well confess the truth. The Danverses of Crompton were grand people, as high above us as the clouds, and my people were irritated with the idea of the Marajacks going aloft as they promised to do.

My father shot a bolt at them from the pulpit by preaching on pride and its fall, little thinking, poor, dear old man, how prophetic his words were.

Had he entertained the least suspicion of what was looming in the distance he would have run away from his living before he would have said what he did.

The Christian name of that man irritated me. Rugby Danvers! Why Rugby? Harry suggested that he was a human junction connecting the snobocracy and decaying gentility, and Hanley declared that he did not believe it to be his name at all.

I have never seen Hanley show such dislike to any living being before or since.

And Bella, who has renewed our friendship, making it a little warmer than before, was always speaking of him by that offensive name.

Rugby says this and that. Rugby is going to do so-and-so, and Rugby would not permit such a thing for worlds.

Oh! how angry I used to get, and if I had not been so happy in another way I believe I should have made a lasting rupture between us by telling her not to be always dancing Rugby before me like a marionette.

And old Marajack too; his pomposity was always immense, but he swelled out like a balloon after the engagement, and whereas prior to it he only walked about with one thumb in the armpit of his waistcoat, he now put both in that resting-place for the thumbs of snobs, and wore his hat at an angle that was at once a defiance and an insult to all around him.

Mrs. Marajack went upon another tack. She adopted sweet humility, and in a very trying way let us see that she could bear a rise in life without losing her head or her love for old friends. She was quite motherly to Hanley, and in a mincing way conveyed to him the sorrow she felt because he was not quite so good as Rugby.

Harry wanted me to make a race of it. But I said:

"No, Hanley and I have settled the time, and the world shall not move us from it."

And I was assured that Bella would be sorry afterwards for having been in such a hurry to eat her cake, and wish she had shown my deliberation.

It was settled that I was to have a maid before my marriage. After it I could of course have a dozen if I wished, for Hanley, as I have told you, has plenty of money, and birth, and that was what made the assumption of the Marajacks so offensive.

In point of fact I had obtained by far the greater prize, but was modest over my triumph, whereas they, by blowing a trumpet all over the place, had elevated Rugby Danvers into something near Royalty.

A maid was engaged for me. My mother wrote to an old friend of hers, Mrs. Varney, to send one thoroughly versed in her duties, and in two days we got a letter saying that a gem was at my disposal.

"She is a thorough good girl," Mrs. Varney wrote, "and only left her last situation through a trifling indisposition. She appeared to have some trouble on her mind and could not rest where she was, but now she is well again. Her name is Maria Jones."

In due time Maria Jones came, and showed herself to be a pretty, modest, quiet girl, just what I wanted, and in half an hour she proved to me that Mrs. Varney had said nothing more of her than she deserved. As a maid she was perfection itself.

Of course Bella must get a maid also, and got one from the registry office at Mudgely, our nearest market town—a wretched girl who was idle and flighty, and used Bella's scent as well as her gloves, and wore her boots in secret, as was afterwards revealed; but Bella put up with her for the time, until she could get a better one.

Bella's wedding-day drew near, and three days prior to it we, in a Christian spirit, gave a dinner party to the whole of the Marajacks, Rugby Danvers, and some half-dozen friends in the outlying districts, and vast were the preparations to make it a feast worthy of the occasion.

Rugby Danvers arrived with the Marajacks, dressed in a new evening suit, and I could not help thinking that it did not become him. There are few men on whom dinner dress does not look well, and he decidedly was one of them. He seemed to be a little flurried, and I am sure he called my mother "ma'am" as he shook hands with her.

I said as much to my father, but he suggested that Rugby had a cold and only said "hem," but I was almost sure I heard aright.

He seemed to be very glad when dinner was served and he was seated at the table. Our gardener, assisted by the housemaid, waited, and did it very creditably.

We were all merry, and the dinner passed off without a hitch.

After dinner we women sailed into the drawing-room, and in due time the gentlemen joined us, all but Rugby Danvers, who had brought a Chinese puzzle to show us, Mr. Marajack said, and was getting it out of his overcoat pocket. They left the door open a little, as the night was warm, and presently through the open door there came the sound of a woman's voice, and what she said petrified us.

"Oh! James, James, how could you be so cruel as to run away and leave me when you said you loved me so much? You said that master's leaving you all his money would never make any difference to you, and that you would make a lady of me for being so true to you."

We were all breathless with surprise. I recognised Maria's voice, but for the life of me I could not tell whom she was speaking to. Then came the man upon the scene.

"You mustn't bother me, Maria, it isn't fair. I am a gentleman now and I am going to marry a real lady. It can't be put off."

We all knew that voice, for it belonged to Rugby Danvers.

A cold horror settled upon me. I dare not look at Bella or at her father or mother, but in the way

we have of seeing things without actually looking at them I saw Mr. Marajack begin to collapse like a gas bag pricked with a pin.

Nobody could speak, nobody seemed to know what to do, and so we were compelled to listen to what followed.

"When you were Mr. Danvers's valet," Maria sobbed, "and your name was James Smith, you were always nice and good, and you never would have been so cruel as you are now. Oh! Oh!"

"How did you find me out?" asked Rugby, as I must still call him, in the hollow voice of hopeless misery.

"I didn't find you out," Maria said. "I didn't mean to see you again, and if I had known you were here I would have run to the—the—North Pole before I would have come here."

"I saw you yesterday going about the village," Rugby said, "and I was afraid I should be blown upon. But you won't do that, will you?"

"Oh! no, indeed I won't," sobbed Maria. "Good bye."

"Good bye, dear girl," I thought Rugby's voice trembled a little as if Maria were not quite indifferent to him. "I am sorry things are as they are. But I always wanted to marry a lady and be a gentleman you know."

Here I beheld another change in Mr. Marajack. The pin hole was stopped and a fresh supply of gas inflated him again.

Thrusting his thumbs into his waistcoat armholes he strode to the door and, in a state of fiery indignation, confronted the impostor.

CHAPTER IV.

FINIS.

THE situation had now become almost farcical, and would have been entirely so but for poor Bella, to whom the shock must have been terrible. I went quietly over to her and sat down by her side.

She sat silent with her head down and her hand in mine, while Mr. Marajack routed Rugby Danvers, alias James Smith.

"So, fellow," he said, "you are an impostor, are you?"

We could not see Rugby the fallen, but we all had a tolerably correct vision of him in our mind's eye.

His voice alone was sufficient to give a good outline of him.

"I am sorry, sir," he said, "but I never meant to deceive."

"Never meant to deceive," thundered Mr. Marajack, "what do you mean by that? You have deceived, you rascal, you—you—nincompoop!"

"Don't be hard on me, sir," pleaded Rugby. "I would have been kind to your daughter."

"Woe to you if you had not," said Mr. Marajack, "but you have done enough. You have ruined us. You have given us false hopes, and led me into an expenditure that will cramp the domestic comforts of my peaceful household for quite two years to come."

"But, sir, if you will allow me to recoup you I—"

"Allow you to recoup me! Take compensation from a flunkey. Do you know what you are saying?"

"I assure you, sir—"

But here the gentle maid, Maria, struck in with a spirit that astonished Mr. Marajack and evidently pleased her old lover.

"Don't lower yourself any more, James," she said, "you are as good as he is any day. How dare you, sir, insult a man who has been so kind to you?" she said, turning upon Mr. Marajack. "He is much too good for you or for your daughter—there."

"Who is this person?" asked Mr. Marajack. "Am I—a—a—"

"Nincompoop!" said Maria, supplying a word he did not want with a jerk.

I was astonished at the girl, forgetting at the moment how love will transform in such conditions as were then present.

We now thought it time to interpose, and my father, who had sat in his arm-chair moving his head about in his bewilderment with the methodical slowness of the wax old gentleman at Madame Tussaud's, arose and went out to throw oil upon the troubled waters.

"Maria," he said, "go upstairs, there's a good girl."

Maria gave him a little courtesy and left, sobbing out "Good bye, James," and James, alias Rugby, answered, huskily: "Good bye—for the present—Maria."

"Now, Mr. Marajack—and you, sir," my father exclaimed, "come into the drawing-room and let us see what can be done in this unhappy affair."

They came in and the door was closed. I looked at Rugby Danvers—I must keep to the old name—and saw that he was pale, but not otherwise embarrassed. Now that the revelation had come he was going to stand his ground. After all he had committed no great crime and he was independent of everybody there, even Bella.

Hanley was near me, quietly looking at a book, and Harry went and sat down by mother. Mr. Marajack and my father "tackled" the offenders.

"How could you come here and pass yourself off as a man of birth?" my father asked.

"I have not done so," replied Rugby, quietly.

"But you came here under a false name?"

"I was desired to take the name of Danvers by my late master, and as I was born at Rugby I thought it would make a very pretty Christian name. I never said I was anybody, I left others to find out. All I talked about was my money, and I am rich."

"But to think of your aspiring to my daughter," said Mr. Marajack. "How dare you do it?"

"Don't talk nonsense, papa," put in Bella, quietly, "it was we who aspired to him. As soon as Mr. Danvers came into the village we decided he would be a good husband for me."

"Thank you, miss," said Rugby Danvers, gratefully.

Cutting the ground away in this fashion from under the feet of Mr. Marajack settled him. Bella being so candid put indignation out of the question, and the unhappy father suddenly lost all his gas and became a mere crumpled mass of flimsy material.

"I don't feel well," he said, feebly. "Rector, if you could get me a little brandy, or may I go to the dining-room and help myself to a glass of wine?"

"Do, by all means," my father said.

Mr. Marajack went out of the room, Rugby Danvers politely opening the door for him—an act of courtesy the outraged father refused to acknowledge. After he was gone Rugby made his farewell address.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, taking up the attitude of an after-dinner speech-maker, "I do not suppose that I shall ever put myself right in your eyes, but I don't care very much for that so long as I am not wrong in my own. I do not feel I have done any wrong. I came down here—a man of independent means left me by a kind master who was pleased to call me a good servant. I believe there is honour attached to honest servitude, and I never so much as swindled him out of starch for a white necktie. I aspired to become a gentleman, and according to the way I have been treated to-night it appears that by doing so I have committed a crime. Perhaps it would have been more credit to me if I had become a thief—you at least make me think so. I am sorry for the young lady whose name has been mixed up with mine, but I beg to assure her and to assure you all that she might have done worse than marrying me. I would have been kind to her, and if she could have eaten gold she might have had it; but after the way that bouncable old rascal has treated me I have only to wish you all a very good evening and to assure you that I shall never trouble any of you again."

He bowed, not without some dignity, and left behind him a small body of people in a state of

semi-petrification. Hanley was the first to recover and to speak.

"The fellow is better than I thought," he said. "He has something of the man in him. He is half-way on the road towards being a gentleman."

"I hate him," was all Bella said as she rose. "I hope, Mrs. Howe, you will forgive my retiring. It is impossible that I should remain here any longer to-night."

We did not attempt to detain her, and Mrs. Marajack also rising took a formal leave of us, bearing ourselves most creditably. Old Marajack, however, having taken a little more wine than he ought to have done became melo-dramatic, and talked about the "pall in which he was enveloped hovering over us and fluttering its wings with the breath of vengeance"—a piece of hazy metaphor I have not been able to quite understand to this day.

Twenty-four hours afterwards Rugby Danvers left the haunted house, and the next day an auctioneer took possession of it and posted on the outer wall a notice of the sale of all the household furniture and other effects of the departed tenant, and that bill could be seen from the White House so plainly that Mr. Marajack said it haunted him like an evil eye.

I wrote to Bella asking her if she would think an invitation to my wedding unkind, and she replied she would be very glad to come. So I had her over to stay a few days with me and we were soon just as good friends as ever.

To crow over a fallen foe is an unpardonable thing, so as Bella and I were only foes in a love sense unseemly rejoicing would be peculiarly unbecoming. But I cannot help feeling elated, the more so perhaps on account of the downfall of Bella being the very best thing that could have happened to her.

She has come to grief, but she will not mourn for ever. I chose her for my first bridesmaid and the first groomsmen was one Mauson Thurlie, a friend of Hanley's, quite as rich and almost as good-looking as Hanley. He did honour to my wedding by falling in love with Bella, and actually stayed at the rectory for a week, ostensibly in recognition of my father's hospitality, but really with the object of proposing.

Hanley and I were in the third week of our honeymoon in Switzerland when that obliging friend the post brought us letters from home. One was from Mauson Thurlie to Hanley making open confession of his having made arrangements to sail in the matrimonial boat.

"I adore the girl," he wrote, "but I can't stand the old griffin, her father. He gets bigger every time I see him, and I have a hope that he will soon rise like a balloon and float away into space never to return. I shall make him an allowance and nail him down to one visit—a week long—to my place in the year. Bella and I are to be married in a month quietly."

"I hope they will be as happy as we are," said Hanley, a sentiment I cordially endorsed.

The only inconvenience I suffer from is the want of a maid—I have not one to suit me yet. Maria left me on the day previous to my marriage.

It was very awkward, but I could not reasonably detain her. She came to my room in the morning crying and with a letter in her hand.

"If you please, miss," she said, "I want to go away."

"Go away, Maria?" I exclaimed.

"Yes, miss. James, as was Rugby here and was James before, has wrote to say he can't live without me, and that he's got a ring and a licence, and, oh! miss, I can't stay any longer—if I do I shall die."

So I let her go, and the aspiring James or Rugby, whichever you please, married her and no doubt will make her a good husband. Hanley says he will, and I do not believe it possible for Hanley to make a mistake in anything matrimonial.

BOATMEN are regularly hired to watch the bridges at Rome, so many people commit suicide by leaping into the Tiber.

NOBLE AT LAST;

OR,

THE HEADSMAN OF ROUEN.

(AN HISTORICAL ROMANCE.)

CHAPTER VII.

THE REVELATION.

WHAT momentous changes for good or ill may not be wrought by a little month?

Only one brief month had slipped away since the terrible events described in our last chapter, yet in that narrow space of fleeting time Fate, the remorseless, the mysterious, the irrevocable, seemed to have all but exhausted her vials of wrath, ruin and despair, upon the two innocent and hapless characters of our story, around whom the chief interest and sympathy of the reader must have thus far centred.

Upon the accusation of her own father, and at the instance of concurrent circumstances whose fatal web she was powerless to break, Gabrielle de Montfort had been carried to Paris for trial, had been tried and convicted of the murder of the Baron de Coucy, and was now a prison inmate of her native city under sentence of death, which was to be carried into effect by the public executioner of Rouen the following day—the 13th of August, 1453.

Her trial had been a mere mockery. In the general belief that existed in her guilt, and in the fact of her own father's seemingly virtuous hostility towards her, the few influential friends and relatives she possessed had withdrawn their support.

The task of defending her had been assigned to an advocate of obscure reputation and inferior ability.

He could do next to nothing against the circumstantial and iniquitous evidence arrayed against her, sustained and strengthened, moreover, by the indignation of both king and dauphin, with whom of late the family of De Coucy had stood in high esteem.

The simple and truthful story of her connection with the crime, which she had persistently and energetically adhered to, had found little or no credence in Paris.

Even her proffered refutation of the Count de Montfort's statement, so far as proving that a subsequent examination of his bed showed that it had not been slept in, or even disturbed, upon the fatal night when he claimed to have been awakened by her entrance into his chamber, dagger in hand, to finish the heaping of his table with the stolen treasure, for the purpose of having the crime attributed to his avarice, went for little or nothing in a court that had prejudged her.

The lavatoire's evidence of the count having been engaged in cleansing blood from his own hands at the time of father and daughter recognising each other was equally surmounted or set aside by the cruel prosecution.

The prisoner's confessed repugnance to the deceased as a prospective bridegroom furnished the controlling motive of revenge and a burning desire for deliverance; a theory which her youth, her beauty, her acknowledged gentleness of disposition, and the known purity and innocence of her life previous to the crime altogether failed to counteract.

Her one faithful friend and distracted lover, the young Viscount de Chanzy, who had haunted the trial like a spectre, was not only without influence, but himself proscribed, attainted, and virtually outlawed.

He had not dared to come forward with a confession of the contemplated elopement on the very threshold of the crime, through fear of still further prejudicing her cause.

And at last, when he had boldly disturbed the proceedings by denouncing her accusers as false and perjured in open court, he was driven ignominiously forth with the private but authoritative intimation that a fresh attempt would

subject him to arrest for contempt, and perhaps to graver penalties.

His only despairing hope of succoring his betrothed lay in the preservation of his liberty, and even then he was powerless.

The simple people of Rouen indeed, whose love and estimation for the hapless daughter were proportionate with their knowledge and execration of the father's capability for infamy, were unanimous in the belief in Gabrielle's innocence and in sympathy for her unhappy fate.

But nothing availed to avert it as yet.

It was a comparatively barbarous age in which the administration of justice was as imperfect as it was corrupt.

Truth and innocence were to be sacrificed to cupidity and fear. The pleadings of youth, beauty, and virtue were in vain, and Gabrielle de Montfort, the Pearl of Normandy, as she had been often called, was in a felon's cell, awaiting the headsman's stroke at the morrow's dawn.

It was on the day preceding the one set for the execution, and on just such another bright summer's afternoon as that in which we first saw him there, that the Good Father of the Black Grotto was again seated at the door of his cave.

He was meditative and expectant, as upon the former occasion, but a troubled change had taken place in his aspect.

The calm benevolence of his blue eyes and clear, un wrinkled brow was overclouded by a profound and settled gloom.

Yet through it all there was a strangely satisfied, triumphant look, as in secret self-congratulation for some life-object, long hoped, long waited for, and at last almost attained.

A step upon the shaded pathway near at hand aroused him, and he rose to meet his expected visitor.

This time he came on foot, and the terrible change which wasting anguish and sleepless vigils had wrought in features late youthful and comely afforded a surer disguise than slouching hat and muffling cloak, but the hermit knew him for the same.

"My lord viscount, you are welcome to such consolation as I can offer," said he.

"Consolation! There is not any left—hope fades off the earth, and naught but horror and despair are throned instead!" cried Bertrand, in a hollow voice. "But I have been here many days without finding you."

"True; I have been otherwise engaged, and to-day I probably desert my hermitage for ever."

"Ha! But now I remember thou wast here sage and kindly confidant for years—and unto thee also must her cruel fate strike home. Thou, the hermit, the Good Father, goest forth, then, from thy rocky home?"

"Ay, and to be known as such among men never more for ever."

A brief silence ensued, during which they regarded each other fixedly; the one with a sort of troubled commiseration in his clear, deep, gaze, the other with a wild and haggard glance in which pleading inquiry mingled with mysterious awe.

The hermit was the first to break the silence.

"Let us say farewell," he said, holding out his hand. "Thou hast repaid the money which I lent thee; there is nothing more; to-morrow will dawn, and then—all will be over and done. Farewell!"

"Ha! do I dream, or speakest thou the truth?" almost shrieked the hapless youth. "Will to-morrow's dawn, indeed, behold the whitest throat in Normandy upon the block—the fairest, loveliest head in womanhood's domain beneath the headsman's axe? Good Father, tell me, tell me that I dream, and must awake anon! Be good as thou art wise—be merciful as thou art mysterious—and tell me that it cannot be!"

The hermit could find no words to answer such a wild, extravagant entreaty, and merely made a hopeless, deprecating gesture.

"It is true, then—true as death, true as

wickedness!" resumed the grief-crazed man, in even more despairing tones. "Oh, it is passing horrible! And Gaultier—the blood-stained tyrant's tool, beneath whose stroke my ill-starred father's head went rolling in the dust—the same hideous Gaultier will lend his fatal offices to her whom I had hoped to nestle in my heart! Speak to me, man of mystery and fate. Or art thou turned to frost whilst I am in consuming flame?"

"Why, then, 'twere madness to oppose mere frost to fire," said the hermit, sadly. "A madman's rage tempts not the words of wisdom and of truth."

"So I will be calmer, then," murmured Bertrand, burying his face in his hands with convulsive shuddering; and when he raised it a preternatural calmness had succeeded the distortion of furious emotion. "Tell me then, Good Father," he added, hoarsely, "is there no hope—no outlet of escape?"

The hermit shook his head.

"So, then, Gabrielle de Montfort—the pure, the innocent, the noble—must submit to Gaultier's hangman hands?"

"Alas! my duty is plain—I must needs perform it," was the response, with an absent, pre-occupied air.

"Thy duty?" repeated Bertrand, in sudden amazement. "What canst thou mean? Oh, I see, to comfort and console her to the last! Blessed privilege!"

It had not been the intention of the Good Father of the Black Grotto to betray himself; but he made no effort to correct his words.

"Dismiss all hope and depart from hence," he said, abruptly.

"That I cannot do, I must linger to the last, even in the scaffold's shadow!" cried Bertrand, desperately. "At least," he added, with a ghost of his old curiosity, "tell me who thou art, since thou and I must separate for ever."

"Why should I not?" muttered the hermit, under his breath. "Yes, it will be better so. Another's hate, another's scorn, cannot perceptibly augment the hideous obloquy of half the world."

"Speak, I pray thee," persisted the young noble, earnestly. "Thou hast been kind and generous to me, and, as a parting kindness, I would know thy name—thy real name and station, which I feel these anchorite's habiliments but hide."

"Thou'lt shudder to know me."

"Nay, nay, but that would be impossible."

"'Tis a name synonymous with hate and fear; a station freighted with the world's contempt."

"It cannot be."

"'Twill cause all benefits thou hast received from me to turn to poison in thy recollection; 'twill make thee deem ingratitude for them a duty and a virtue."

"Preposterous!"

"Swear, then, upon thy knightly word, that thou wilt ne'er reveal the strange identity between this hermit's garb and my true character, which I am on the point of knowing thee."

"I swear."

"Look, then! Behold!" cried the anchorite, suddenly tearing off his snowy beard and hair, and stepping out of his friar's cloak, transformed indeed.

Bertrand started back appalled. He could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses.

"Gaston Gaultier, the headsman of Rouen!" he gasped.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER SECRET UNMASKED.

"AY, my lord, the same!" replied the pseudo hermit, with impenetrable calmness. "Now thou wilt willingly depart without further questioning, I make no doubt."

"The Executioner of Rouen!" repeated Bertrand, still dismayed. "I cannot understand—I stand amazed!"

He was struggling with opposite emotions, in

which horror, indignation, resentment, and a confused consciousness of signal obligations incurred, struggled alternately for the mastery.

"You cannot understand my motives for assuming and so long maintaining a harmless and benevolent disguise," said Gaultier. "Nor would it comport with my mood to explain them to reluctant ears. Though wherefore is it strange that one condemned to obloquy, contempt, and scorn in all men's eyes should seek at intervals the consolation of their love, esteem, and gratitude beneath a borrowed robe?"

"Yet stay!" cried the viscount, as the executioner cast the articles of his disguise within the grotto, and then secured the door, as though preparing to depart. "I cannot forget the service thou hast done me, though my father's blood forbids me—though a deep abyss yawns suddenly between us. Thy motives have not been unworthy; I now can understand the expiation thou didst hint of."

"But which, to-morrow, will have run its course," said Gaston. "My office and expiation will expire at once."

"Ha! To-morrow? I partly comprehend, at least," exclaimed Bertrand, shrinking back aghast once more. "She—Gabrielle—is also doomed to perish at thy hands? Monster! And thou hast known her from a child—hast cheated her of friendship and esteem unwittingly bestowed—hast simulated priestly blessing on her stainless brow! Oh, horror!"

"True, but she will never know nor guess the truth, for thou art sworn to secrecy," murmured Gaultier, with indescribable sadness. But he presently added, with a sort of dreary triumph: "Courage, my heart! But one more struggle—one more cruel stroke—and then my hideous employment falls away from me like to a blood-stained mantle cast aside and I am free—free and noble!"

"Free and noble?" echoed Bertrand, hoarsely, for he had caught the words, though uttered in a soliloquy. "What—thou? Monster, thou ravest!"

"Not so, my lord. Know, then, the truth, despite these bad, injurious terms applied to me. It is decreed that the executioner who shall strike off, each with a single blow, nine noble heads shall then a patent of nobility receive himself. Eight have already fallen beneath my axe—to-morrow's ninth awaits me. 'Tis the law."

"Blasphemous wretch, 'tis false!" fairly screamed the viscount, forgetful of everything in renewed frenzy. "A law like that would scorch the statute book to ashes—make both God and man appalled!"

"Away! I speak the truth!"

"Why, then, by all the fiends, thou ne'er shalt reap thy blood-reward!" cried Bertrand, fairly beside himself, and plucking forth his sword. "Draw, miscreant! In consideration of what thou hast disguisedly performed for me I waive our differences of rank and station. Draw, I tell thee!"

"Boy! wait till to-morrow, when my rank shall even overshadow thine."

"And when her blood also reddens thy foul hands? Never! Draw, or be spitted like a dog!"

"I am but the instrument of law, thou foolish boy! As well to blame the axe itself as blame the hand that wields it. Begone, my lord! All patience hath its limits."

"Let me overstep thine, thou cowardly slave!" shouted the viscount, forgetful alike of the valour and generosity that had been so proved to him; and, levelling his sword-point full at Gaston's throat, he rushed upon him.

Notwithstanding the suddenness of the attack, the latter evaded it by a gliding, sidewise movement, executed with wonderful nimbleness for one of his size and weight.

"Have then thy wish!" he muttered through his clenched teeth, though, quickly as he crossed swords with the youth, he seemed to do so with reluctance.

The result of this passage at arms was but for a moment doubtful, however.

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attack, it was met and baffled by an address immeasurably superior to his own.

It appeared that this adversary merely permitted him to exhaust himself with fruitless attempts, and then, as if weary of the sombre pastime, he suddenly disarmed him by a lightning-like pass, accompanied by a quick, wrenching twist of the wrist.

Away went De Chanzy's rapier flying through the air, and at the next instant a blow in the chest from the pommel of the other's sword hurled him prostrate on his back.

"Ingrate! Pampered boy!" hoarsely ejaculated the victor, apparently inspired by sudden and angry hatred, as he half knelt beside his foe and levelled his rapier at his throat; "I have spared—befriended thee till now with greater cause to hate thee than thou dreamest. Wilt sue for life?"

"Never at thy hands" was the scornful response, accompanied by a strange, startled look, and then a contemptuous smile. "Sir Executioner, thy coolness is replaced by rage. Kill whilst I'm in thy power, for I fathom the secret of thy transformation."

"I regret my anger; it is past," returned Gaultier, quickly recovering his equanimity as he arose, re-sheathed his sword and carelessly pointed to the one that lay on the turf.

Bertrand gloomily arose, returned his own sword to the scabbard and seemed divided by a number of emotions, in which scorn and hatred were still uppermost.

"I cannot fight you after what has passed," said he, sullenly. "But I am not without satisfaction. Secret and adamant as thou art, thou has betrayed thyself."

"What meanest thou? Even wise men's tempers may be lost at times, my lord viscount."

"Ay, sir, and jealousy, however guarded, must betray itself with wise men, as with fools."

"How—jealousy?"

Bertrand gave a harsh, bitter laugh. He was a young man of more than ordinary perceptions. Assisted by recollections of many peculiarities in the hermit's manner when in Gabrielle's society, theretofore unthought of, or incomprehensible, the unmistakable though temporary ebullition of animosity on the part of his victorious adversary had not been thrown away.

"Thou lovest Mademoiselle de Montfort?" said he.

Gaston recoiled as if he had received a mortal thrust. His chin fell upon his breast, his hands helplessly to his sides, his entire manner confessed the truth of the charge.

"Ha, ha, ha! But do not think I blame thee, since a reptile may regard a queen!" cried Bertrand, mercilessly—even more callous than before to the requirements of magnanimity and gratitude. "How couldst thou help it, watching as thou didst, though under a paternal mask, her grace and beauty blossoming from child to maiden's, and from maid's to woman's charms? Foul as thou art thou daredst to love her? Be it so. Ha, ha, ha! It fills my soul with joy to greet thee, even thee, as rival there! Dost hear? It brims me up with joy, joy, joy! And knowest thou why?"

Gaston had cloaked his emotion with profound, impenetrable sadness. He merely regarded him fixedly, without vouchsafing a reply.

"Look! I will tell thee why then," cried the viscount, without abating his strange, joyless hilarity. "It is because to-morrow's dawn shall witness my revenge! On, I will be there, Sir Executioner—there at the scaffold's foot! I will not shudder when I see her perfect neck caress the black block with its marble whiteness—no, no, not I—for 'twill but mark a moment's pang—her soul's transition to immortal bliss! But thou—how wilt thou with inward torture writhe, as thou dost raise the headman's axe above the neck of her thou lovest too! Ha, ha, ha! A knowledge of thy torments will console my grief with balm. Look, likewise, that thou faltest not! A tremor of the hand—a hair's-breadth deviation of the blade—which might

necessitate a second hack, a double stroke, and then, good luck! farewell to knightly honours and to noble rank! Ha, ha, ha! Strike sure, I tell thee! 'Tis a slender neck—not half so thick as was my father's, which thy knightly blow, thy princely stroke, thy proud, baronial hands, did sever so humanely! Yet, oh! what horror, what remorse 'twill cause thee! And therein is my joy, I say. Ha, ha, ha! I'll scarce retain myself for joy!"

His voice had risen to a wild, hysterical shriek. He shook his hands above his head, he tore his hair, he rushed away, the rocky walls of the peaceful glen re-echoing to his mad, unreal mirth, until it died away.

The executioner remained for some moments, with folded arms and drooping brow, in statuesque repose and silence.

Then he started into life and looked around. The mad and ruined youth had probed his secret wound, but had not calculated upon the mysterious, self-centred strength of that loving, solitary soul.

Gaultier did not manifest the anguish of his conflicting emotions by tearing his hair, or casting himself upon the ground, as his weaker and equally suffering rival might have done.

The perspiration stood in drops upon his brow, he trembled still, and agony of heart and mind was wreathed upon his noble face. But, ere he strode away, he had rearmoured himself in his pride and his ambition, as in a shirt of mail.

"The poor, despairing fool!" he muttered, at length. "He judges me but by his own weak nature. He cannot guess the girding strength with which I trample under foot each worldly hope and dream—ay, even love itself—the love of her—the one sweet, dewy and refreshing day-dream of my icy soul—to gain my lofty end! But let it pass. So I am steel once more!"

He strode away toward his home. He had stepped out of his Good Father's disguise, even as an execrated fiend might have resigned an angel's covering.

All shrank away—man, woman, child—at his approach; but he heeded not, and reached his house at last.

(To be Continued.)

FACETIÆ.

FOOT AND MOUTH DISEASE.—Gout from glutony. Punch.

EDUCATION.

LADY (paying her Christmas milk-bill, complains of the inattention of the carrier): "And I shall be obliged to withdraw my custom if it continues."

MILKMAN: "I'm really very sorry, ma'am, and I'll endeavour that it shan't occur again. But you see, ma'am, it's their ignorance—(confidentially)—now, you and me's ejected—ejected people won't carry milk—and so we have to employ the lowest sort!" Punch.

CAUSE AND EFFECT.

THE REV. MR. DRYPREACH: "What are you beating the poor donkey for, Johnny?"

JOHNNY: "'Cos he's sleepy. He's often that way on Mondays."

THE REV. MR. D.: "How's that, Johnny?"

JOHNNY: "Feyther says it's 'cos he's got to take old granny to the sarmin on Sundays. But, dang it! how can that be when he's got to stay outside!" Moonshine.

A SOUND THRASHING.—Beating a drum. Moonshine.

A DRY SUBJECT.—An Egyptian mummy. Moonshine.

THE BEST WAY TO KILL TIME.—Work. Moonshine.

WOMAN'S SPHERE.—The world, of course. Moonshine.

MATEFAMILIAR: "You've got the basket. Now go and take my compliments to Mrs.

Hodge, and ask if she can oblige me with a dozen new-laid eggs. Well, what are you waiting for?"

LADY HELP: "Please, m'm, where's the compliments?" Moonshine.

THE complaint from which so many frail, because bibulous, fellow-creatures are suffering just now.—The New Year-ache. Moonshine.

GIRLS' LAUGHTER.

I LOVE to hear the pleasant sound,
The merry rippling trilling;
I joy to hear the peal go round,
The room with gladness filling.

I'm not so young as years ago;
With care my brow is shaded;
I squint, I'm told; I'm bald, I know;
My cheeks and lips are faded.

I'm very lame, and limping drag
One foot the other after;
But, oh, I love to hear girls wag
Their tongues in cheery laughter.

Yet, though I know them void of
sense,

The jocund sounds I treasure;
But as their laugh's at my expense
'Tis not unsullied pleasure. Fun.

LISSON TO THIS.

No one in Liisson Grove was ever known to put his or her ear to a keyhole. The old proverb, "Liisson"—ers hear no good of themselves is known and acted upon in the above district. Fun.

"HAPPY MAN."

LADY: "We were so sorry— You must have had such a melancholy Christmas, Giles!"

GILES: "Melancholy, mum? Bless yer, no, mum! The old 'ooman in the 'ospital, that 'awful of a son o' mine took up for poachin', an' my darter gone nobody knows where, I ain't 'ad such a merry Christmas this many's the long year." Fun.

As some lady visitors were going through a penitentiary under the escort of a superintendent, they came to a room in which three women were sewing. "Dear me!" one of the visitors whispered, "what vicious-looking creatures! Pray what are they here for?" "Because they have no other home. This is our sitting-room, and they are my wife and two daughters," blandly answered the superintendent.

THE NEW POTATO CULTIVATOR.—The land agitator. Judy.

PARADOXICAL.—The greatest novelty in London: The smallest people ("Midgets") in the world at the Piccadilly Hall. Judy.

GREAT BORES.—The St. Gothard Tunnel long sermons, and the rebels at the Cape. Judy.

FLATS.—People who do not live in them. Judy.

BEST place to see the Old Year out.—The New Inn. Judy.

BOTH TOO WARM FOR 1881.—Ulster and the Cape. Judy.

THE LAND LEAGUER'S FORM OF OATH.—"I'll take my 'Davitt." Funny Folks.

A-BORR-TIVE EFFORTS.—Those made by the Transvaal Dutch. Funny Folks.

'CAWS WHY?

"How is it that dark people develope wrinkles sooner than fair?" asks a society journal. The reason—or shall we say the "caws"—is evident. Raven locks have a natural affinity for "crows'-feet." Funny Folks.

"GOOD FORM" IN SURREY.—Chloro-form. Funny Folks.

A LUX-URY AT LAST.

THE latest electric lamp is the invention of a Mr. Maxim. Let us hope, at last, the Maxim-um of light is obtained at a minimum of cost. Funny Folks.



[THE OLD, OLD STORY.]

A STRANGE WEDDING.

CHAPTER I.

THE Hafod Gwynant, in Wales, is a picturesque old house close by the shores of a beautiful lake, and lying on the slope of a little fir-clad hillock. Its tall gables rising from amid the trees were all of it that could be seen from the road; but the windows of the house itself commanded uninterrupted views of the valley stretched out below. One day, during the summer of 1879, a tall, well-built, handsome-visaged man, clad in loose, coarse attire, was seen walking up the garden pathway leading to the fine old house. The young pedestrian, as he walked up the avenue, thought it a perfect Paradise. On being informed that Mr. Penrose was at home, he sent in his card, and was ushered into a sitting-room.

Soon afterwards the door opened, and the gentleman he sought for entered. He was a tall, elderly man, with a benignant countenance and well-cut features.

"Mr. Nelson—Mr. Guy Nelson, I believe," he said, alternately looking at the card he held in his hand and his visitor, who had risen and bowed to him on his entrance.

"Yes, that is my name, sir," replied the younger man. "You are not acquainted with me personally; but I believe you will remember my father—Mr. Henry Nelson, of Cloughborough."

"Henry Nelson! Remember him! I should think I do. Why, he was my old schoolfellow at Rugby. We were the closest chums in those days. And—you are his son? Let me grasp your hand for dear old Harry's sake."

The two men shook hands warmly.

"And how is my old friend? I have not heard of him for a long, long time now," continued Mr. Penrose.

"Alas, sir, he has been dead these eight years. I am his only son. He often spoke of you to me, and told me many and many a story of the schoolboy frolics you two had together."

Tears were fast rising into the other's eyes. These old memories of our boyhood's happy past, how dear they are to us all! How vividly they come back to us across the ocean of a lifetime!

The two were silent for a few minutes, when the young man continued:

"I am rambling through North Wales on a tourist expedition. Having heard at Beggelert that you had a residence in the neighbourhood, I have taken the liberty to call and introduce myself to one whom my poor father so often spoke of and so dearly loved."

"And I am only too pleased to make your acquaintance," replied Mr. Penrose: "a son of Henry Nelson's will always find a true friend in me. Come and let me introduce you to my wife and niece. You must stay the day with us."

He led the way into another room, where two ladies were seated at work. One was an

elderly little woman; the other, a pretty, coquettish-looking girl, scarcely nineteen, with a wavy mass of rippling golden hair, and soft grey eyes under dark eyelashes.

These were respectively Mrs. Archibald Penrose and Miss Amy Brightwell. The latter was Penrose's dead sister's child—an orphan, and his ward. She was a frivolous little creature, but her pretty, caressing ways made her a favourite everywhere.

Her life, though, was not so gay as she would have liked it. She sighed for the gaieties, the fashions, the frivolities of the age. Her uncle, though very well off, was but a Manchester cotton spinner, after all, and between a red villa in the suburbs of Cottonopolis and this summer resort by the Welsh lake their days were divided.

She had never been to London, but longed for its gaieties as a child longs for a beautiful toy it has heard of and never seen. Her delight in seeing this tall, handsome stranger was unfeigned. Visitors were not every-day occurrences at the Hafod, by any means, and a fine-looking man like Guy Nelson was a special rarity.

It was, indeed, a red-letter day for Amy; a delightful change from the dull monotony of her everyday life. She found the young man as agreeable to talk to as he was to look at. He was evidently a polished, cultured gentleman. He told her about the great world of London she longed to see—of its life, its gaieties, its vortex of unending amusements and rounds of pleasure-making. She listened to him dreamily and happily. The story of these unknown glories was to her the next best thing to sweet reality itself.

When evening came he rose to take his departure; to walk back to Beggelert in the rosy stillness of the summer afterglow. Before leaving, his host pressed him to come and spend a few days at the Hafod, if his time was his own and he was not in too great a hurry to see all the "lions" of Wales. Amy was delighted on hearing the invitation. Would he accept it?

"You are very kind, Mr. Penrose," the young man replied, warmly, "but I could not trespass further on your hospitality. I have done so already too much, I fear."

"My dear sir, don't talk nonsense. It would be quite a charity to us all if you would come. Look at poor Amy there. She says she is moped to death in this quiet old house. Do come if it will not be a bore to you."

And so it was arranged that Guy should come back again on the morrow by the coach and bring his luggage with him.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning, when the sun's first rays were tinging Snowdon's summit with all manner of prismatic hues, Amy was up with the lark, and busily employing herself about the house, rearranging and adjusting everything to her own entire satisfaction. When her aunt came downstairs she was quite astonished at her niece's unwonted industry.

"It is all for our handsome visitor to admire," remarked Uncle Archie, slyly, at breakfast, explaining the reasons for Amy's handiwork.

The young man arrived at noon, and the rest of the day was spent in strolling about the grounds and down by the margin of the lake.

Day succeeded day, and there was always plenty for the stranger to do and see in this lovely Cambrian district. The young people were left pretty much to themselves to find out new amusements and plan excursions.

Sometimes Uncle Archie would accompany them in their longer trips, but in their many walks and mountaineering scrambles about home the two were nearly always alone. Perhaps the old people were to blame in not keeping a stricter watch over their wayward little niece, and in not checking her too constant companionship with a comparative stranger; perhaps the stranger was hardly honourable and straightforward enough in allowing such a state of affairs to go on so

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long; but, however it was, in a very short time Amy had fallen madly, hopelessly in love with her new companion.

In love—with all the exuberance and delight of a first giddy passion—with all the romance of her young, girlish nature. He had become her hero, her ideal.

One day, down by the reedy lake, under the shadows of the mighty mountain, he asked her to be his wife. In a moment she consented. With all the wild impetuosity of her temperament she gave herself up to him—only that she might love him, love him and adore him always. And then arose a great temptation.

He told her that for reasons she would not understand he was unable at present to ask her guardian formally for her hand. And in a flood of passionate entreaty he asked her to leave her home and kindred, to go with him to London, and there be married secretly. Once married, the rest would follow easily. Her uncle and aunt would pardon and forgive.

Poor Amy listened, believed, and trusted. For his sake she would do and dare anything. She tried to look upon it as a mere frolic, this secret elopement. Had not hundreds done so before them? Did not all cherished romance hinge on clandestine marriages? Why should not she have a romance of her own? And happiness was sure—so sure—to follow. Of course Uncle Archie would forgive her, and only laugh at her foolishness, as he had done oftentimes before over her girlish pranks and foibles. Thus carefully she shaped her arguments to convince herself.

A night was fixed for the escapade. Guy was to procure a trap, and they were to start an hour after midnight for Tremadoc—a distance of fourteen miles—where they would be in time for an early morning express that left for London.

The eventful evening arrived. A portmanteau or two had been packed and carefully secreted amongst the bracken by the entrance gate, to be in readiness at the time of departure.

Amy, in spite of all her romance, was thoughtful enough to leave a letter of farewell and explanation on her dressing table. At the appointed time she was ready and waiting for him.

Her window opened on a balcony, which conducted by a flight of steps—in the Italian fashion—to the garden below. Thither Guy came for her in the moonlight.

Amy fondly pictured him as ardent Romeo of old, while she—poor, foolish girl—imagined herself a very Juliet.

And so she passed out into the night, and he led her to the waiting carriage; passed without one last look behind her at the old home she was leaving, oblivious of everything save the unutterable happiness of the present.

And the carriage rolled on through the moonlit woods and sleeping villages, past sombre lakes and mountain streams, away—through the starry stillness of the night, through the dusky shadows, through the faint beams of the waning moon, through the soft-breaking grey of the dawn; away—to a new world, a new life; away—to the dim horizon of an unknown future; away—to what fate, who could tell?

CHAPTER III.

MARRIED, and in London! Dreams realised, hopes fulfilled. The wedding has taken place by special licence soon after their arrival in a little church down Paddington way. They then remained at an hotel until their own apartments should be ready to receive them.

Once duly installed, however, in what was to be their permanent abode, Amy found everything comfortable and even elegant. Guy seemed a really well-to-do man.

What his business or profession was she had never troubled herself to inquire. Her love had been far too ethereal ever to descend to such a mere worldly consideration.

But as the weeks went by she began to lack

one thing—the one great thing—society. No one called upon her; nor did Guy take her out visiting, or introduce her to a single soul. He too began to be less at home; generally being away all day, and not returning till late at night.

The days grew as monotonous as they used to be in the old time at her uncle's house; though she had now plenty of money at her own disposal, and every opportunity for spending it. In one thing only did Guy put a check on her expenditure—he forbade her to give anything away in street charity; the reason for which prohibition she could not understand.

Soon after her arrival in London she had written to her dear old guardian, telling him she was happy, and beseeching his forgiveness in her own loving fashion.

He wrote back to her a long, severe letter, which made her weep bitter tears of repentance, but, from its tone, she knew that he would not carry his righteous indignation any further than this mere written reproof.

In fact, she was married, and it was too late to do anything now without raising a public scandal.

At length, tired of her loneliness, Amy appealed to her husband. She wanted friends, society—the life of fashionable gaiety she had so long sighed for.

"Amy," he replied, almost angrily, "I married you for yourself, and I had hoped that you married me for a similar reason. I have never contracted friendships, and do not wish you to contract any."

What a cruel, bitter blow to all her bright anticipations!

She did not answer him, but brooded over what he had told her for days in silence. What a life lay before her! No friends, no gaieties, no amusements. The dull humdrum of a solitary married life, in which her husband took but little part. She looked back upon the old, happy, daily companionship of a loving uncle and aunt with regret—the old life she had deemed so listless, so monotonous, so void of pleasure.

At length Guy gave her permission to write for Mrs. Penrose to come and stay with her. She did so, but feared the invitation would be declined.

Were not all home ties cut asunder for ever? But no, the kindly old lady had forgiven her and promised to come. With her arrival Amy's spirits revived.

Though the two went to many of the metropolitan places of amusement, Mrs. Penrose was considerably surprised at finding her niece friendless, without even an acquaintance. She wanted to know, too, what was Mr. Nelson's business.

Amy had some confused notions that he had a large warehouse in the City, but beyond this was utterly ignorant of her husband's doings.

The old lady shook her head. A pretty wife, indeed, not to know how her husband earned his living. She questioned Guy herself that evening, but received only an evasive answer.

The weeks went by, and the state of affairs between Guy and his wife began to grow more unsatisfactory. He was away from home more than ever—sometimes for whole nights without properly accounting for his absence. He grew less communicative. She knew literally nothing of his daily life. Mrs. Penrose, however, continued to remain, and to her Amy confided all her troubles. Some sort of mystery seemed to hang over this married life of hers.

Why had not Guy told her everything about himself before she married him? Why did he keep secrets from her now? She began to suspect and fear all sorts of evils, so greatly did her husband's reserve and strange habits puzzle and alarm her.

Mrs. Penrose found her becoming strangely altered; no longer the sprightly girl of six short months ago. An appearance of settled melancholy and unhappiness came over her, the passionate love that had been seemed dead within her.

"My dear Amy," exclaimed her aunt, one day when the young wife was sadder than usual, "I have made up my mind to put a stop to this un-

happy state of affairs. So strange a position between a newly-married couple is not to be tolerated. Try to be more cheerful, and leave everything to me. Depend upon it, I will clear up this mystery, if there be one, and, for your future peace of mind, I trust satisfactorily."

The next day Mrs. Penrose went out alone, and returned after several hours very agitated and apparently ill. She would not, however, tell Amy the cause of her uneasiness. The day following she went again, and on her return in the evening walked straight into Amy's little boudoir.

Taking her hands gently into her own she said, gravely:

"Amy, I have discovered all. Do you wish to know your husband's secrets, which are improperly held from you? Do you wish to know how he obtains a livelihood?"

"Oh, aunt!" she cried, in an agonised voice, "I must know everything, even the worst. A fearful presentiment has been with me night and day for months. Let me know the worst at once."

"To-morrow, darling, you shall see it with your own eyes. Be prepared to follow your husband with me after breakfast."

Amy passed a dreadful night, as may be imagined, full of vague forebodings of coming troubles. In the morning she rose unrefreshed, but resolute, determined to put an end to all this unrest and suspense. After breakfast, Guy, as usual, wished them a good morning and departed.

They hastily put on bonnets and shawls and followed him.

It was all they could do to keep up with him, following at a safe distance behind, through streets and squares, courts and bye-lanes. Two long miles had been thus anxiously traversed, when he suddenly turned into a long, narrow alley in one of the lowest quarters of the "great city."

The distressed young wife was too excited to talk. All she could do was to follow blindly whither her companion led her.

What was this horrible truth that was about to be revealed to her?

She half repented of the loathsome task she had set herself—of this underhand method of learning the secrets her husband chose to keep hidden from her; but an irresistible impulse carried her forward, and the two women hurried on, tired though they were, and straining their eyes to keep in view the footsteps of the mysterious man they were following.

At length he paused at the corner of a shabby little street, looked carefully around, drew off his gloves, and, to Amy's amazement, descended into a cellar, down some steep, crooked steps.

Amy awaited his reappearance with trembling anxiety and fearful expectation.

Minutes seemed hours of torture to her. It was as much as Mrs. Penrose could do to prevent her rushing forward and following her mysterious husband.

At last, after half an hour's weary waiting, there came up the cellar steps what appeared to be an old, decrepit soldier, bent double almost with age and suffering.

He had but one arm, the other sleeve of his coat hanging loosely by his side.

On his right eye there was a large black patch. His cheeks looked seared and hollow, while long, shaggy locks of thick grey hair hung down his shoulders.

His dress was that of a by-gone military fashion. On his arm was hung a basket, filled with the cheap, vulgar ballads of the day. He was supported by a crutch, with which he hobbled along at a shuffling gait.

The two ladies, on his appearance, had hurried up to the spot whence he emerged. Amy was aghast, horror-stricken, bewildered, hardly crediting her senses. This wretched spectacle that stood before her was her husband—a common tramp, a wayside beggar, an artful impostor in the streets of London.

In a moment he had seen her standing there and looking at him with dilated eyes and face of abject terror, unable to speak or move. For a

second he stood still and watched her, his face livid under his disguise with rage and baffled fury; then turning suddenly in an opposite direction, he fled down the street, unchecked and unfollowed, till he was lost to view in the maze of winding lanes and alleys that everywhere surrounded him.

With a wild scream Amy fell forward. The utter stupefaction into which the horror of her discovery had thrown her had for the moment prevented her from realising to the full the truth of what had just been revealed.

She had been like one in a momentary trance, unconscious of what had caused the sudden change in her condition. But as reason came back and the truth began to dawn in all hideous, terrible reality, she cried aloud in the agony of her despair and would have fallen had not her aunt supported her.

A little crowd soon collected round them—gaping women and gutter children of the usual street pattern—and one or two helped to carry Amy, who had fainted, into an adjacent house. When she had sufficiently recovered the woman who resided there, a gossip old soul, asked what had so alarmed her.

Of course Amy returned an evasive answer; but Mrs. Penrose questioned the woman as to what she knew of the street tramp who had behaved so strangely, and who appeared in some way connected with the neighbourhood.

She told them that she knew very little, there was a deal of mystery about him, but of one thing she was quite sure—he was making a deal of money by the practising of his deceitful trade.

When he was dressed up, she said, he appeared quite a gentleman; and—this with an odd, curious look at Amy—it was reported he had a grand house somewhere at the fashionable end of London, where he had lately brought home a rich young lady wife, who knew nothing of his ways of living, or that he had already another wife—a beggar life himself—alive in London.

Amy could bear to hear no more. The horror of it all was more than she could endure. She fell back in her chair once more unconscious. A cab was hurriedly called, and Mrs. Penrose got her into it.

She took her to an hotel in the Strand, then telegraphed for her husband to come at once.

Poor Amy—broken-hearted, anguish-stricken, almost wishing she might die—lay languishing for weeks upon a bed of sickness. The memories of that frightful past would haunt her to her grave.

Six months afterward there was once more a household of three in the old Hafod, down by the margin of the fair blue lake in sunny Carnarvonshire.

Amy had gone back again to the old home, the old life, the ties of kindred. But she was no longer the bright, happy girl of yore, when she had neither a care to trouble nor a remembrance to embitter the gay spring-time holiday of her youth. No longer a girl but a woman—aged if not in years yet in experience, a woman who had known bitter sorrow, cruel suffering, grossest treachery and deepest shame, the rude awakening from a first fond dream of passionate, all-trusting love, the total breaking of a heart that had given itself up wholly and entirely to the man who had so basely, so wickedly deceived her.

Of him she never heard again, only that he was an impostor from first to last, for Mr. Penrose had made inquiries and found that his old friend, Henry Nelson, had died childless.

How the man had obtained sufficient information to enable him to pass off for his son ever remained an unsolved mystery.

And Amy lived on with her uncle and aunt, contentedly and even happily, as far as happiness could be her portion now with the sudden ending to her bright young dreams and the cruel blighting of a lifetime. No, the romance was over, the illusion was dispelled. She was left heart-broken, and the love of her bright young nature was dead for evermore. But still the best part of her life lies before her, and there is little doubt that she will spend it profitably and well.

OUR COLUMNS FOR THE CURIOUS.

LORD BROUGHAM'S GHOST STORY.—The following interesting and impressive anecdote appears in "The Life and Times of Lord Brougham, written by Himself," published a few years ago by Blackwood and Co.: "A most remarkable thing," writes Lord Brougham, "happened to me—so remarkable that I must tell the story from the beginning. After I left the High School in Edinburgh I went with G—, my most intimate friend, to attend the classes in the University. We frequently, in our walks, discussed and speculated upon many grave subjects—among others, on the immortality of the soul, and on a future state. This question and the possibility, I will not say of ghosts walking, but of the dead appearing to the living, were subjects of much speculation, and we actually committed the folly of drawing up an agreement, written with our blood, to the effect that whichever of us died first should appear to the other, and thus solve any doubts we had entertained of the life after death. After we had finished our classes at the College G— went to India, having got an appointment there in the Civil Service. He seldom wrote to me, and after the lapse of a few years I had almost forgotten him; moreover, his family, having little connection with Edinburgh, I seldom saw or heard anything of them, or of him through them, so that all the old schoolboy intimacy had died out, and I had nearly forgotten his existence. I had taken, as I have said, a warm bath, and while in it, and enjoying the comfort of the heat after the late freezing I had undergone, I turned my head round towards the chair on which I had deposited my clothes, as I was about to get out of the bath. On the chair sat G—, looking calmly at me. How I got out of the bath I know not, but, on recovering my senses, I found myself sprawling on the floor. The apparition, or whatever it was that had taken the likeness of G—, had disappeared. The vision produced such a shock that I had no inclination to talk about it or to speak about it, even to Stuart, but the impression it made upon me was too vivid to be easily forgotten, and so strongly was I affected by it that I have here written down the whole history with the date (19th December), and all the particulars, as they are now fresh before me. . . . For years I had had no communication with G—, nor had there been anything to recall him to my recollection; nothing had taken place during our Swedish travels either connected with G— or with India, or with anything related to him or to any member of his family. I recollected quickly enough our old discussion and the bargain we had made. I could not discharge from my mind the impression that G— must have died, and that his appearance to me was to be received by me as a proof of a future state." This was on December 19, 1799. In October, 1862, Lord Brougham added as a postscript, "I have just been copying out from my journal the account of this strange dream; certissima mortis imago! And now to finish the story, begun about sixty years since. Soon after my return to Edinburgh there arrived a letter from India announcing G—'s death! and stating that he had died on the 19th of December.

THE RHINE.—There are rivers whose course is longer and whose volume of water is greater, but none which unites almost everything that can render an earthly object magnificent and charming in the same degree as the Rhine. As it flows down from the distant ridges of the Alps, through fertile regions into the open sea, so it comes down from remote antiquity, associated in every age with momentous events in the history of the neighbouring nations. A river which presents so many historical recollections of Roman conquests and defeats, of the chivalric exploits in the feudal periods, of the wars and negotiations of modern times, of the

coronations of emperors whose bones repose by its side, on whose borders stand the two grandest monuments of the noble architecture of the middle ages, whose banks present every variety of wild and picturesque rocks, thick forests, fertile plains, vineyards sometimes gently sloping, sometimes perched among lofty crags where industry has won a domain among the fortresses of nature, whose banks are ornamented with populous cities, flourishing towns and villages, castles and ruins with which a thousand legends are connected, with beautiful and romantic roads and salutary military springs, a river whose waters offer choice fish as its banks offer the choicest wines, which in its course of 900 miles affords 630 miles of uninterrupted navigation from Basle to the sea, and enables the inhabitants of its banks to exchange the rich and various products of its shores, whose cities famous for commerce, science and works of strength which furnish protection to Germany are also famous as the seats of Roman colonies and of ecclesiastical councils, and are associated with many of the most important events in the history of mankind; such a river it is not surprising that the Germans regard with a kind of reverence and frequently call it in poetry Father or King Rhine.—Dr Lieker.

A TALK OF THE RATS.—Mr. B— had a reputation for economy and shrewdness. His house being infested with rats a ratcatcher was sent for, who having done his business sought his employer to make known the fact and claim the recompense, for which a hard bargain had as usual been driven. He had a bag over his shoulder containing the result of his labour. The celebrity chanced to be in the drawing-room, where hearing his voice the sturdy ratcatcher sought him and his pay. "You've left no rats behind?" sternly asked the employer, taking out his purse. "No, sir," answered the ratcatcher, surly, for he did not consider the pay liberal or even fair, and was not too amenable inclined. "And what are you going to do with all those rats in your bag?" "Well, I mun make a living, thee knows, any hoo, so I sells 'em," said the man, moodily. "Sell them?" echoed the other, quickly, the light of a new idea irradiating his countenance. "Sell my rats? What right have you to sell my property? I agreed to pay you to catch my rats; I did not say that you were to have my rats when they are caught. Now look here, my man. I'll pay you at once, but first how much are you going to allow me for my rats?" The ratcatcher's patience was exhausted, and strode from the door to Mr. B—, and in abrupt reply to that able manager's anxious inquiry he suddenly, with an angry ejaculation, threw the bag upon the carpet's velvet pile, and catching up the lower end of it scattered the rats at his employer's feet. "Nah, then, take thy blowed old rats and twist them round thy neck." The moral is obvious.

TURPIN HANGED.—From the "Derby Mercury" of April 19, 1739.—York, April 10. Last Saturday Richard Turpin and John Steed were executed here for horse-stealing: the latter died very penitent, but the former behaved with the greatest assurance to the last. It was remarkable that as he mounted the ladder his right leg trembled, on which he stamped it with undaunted courage, looked round about him, and after speaking a few words to the Topsman, he threw himself off the ladder and expired in about five minutes. Before his death he declared himself to be the notorious highwayman, Richard Turpin, and confessed to the Topsman a great number of robberies, which he had committed.

A CHEAP BARGAIN.—The same journal, Derby, April 19, 1739.—We are assured from Kirk Ireton in this county that Thomas Fr—st of that town hath sold his wife and five children to Joseph H—ndf—rd, a clog maker, of the same place for the sum of three halfpence. It is said the parties concerned applied to G—an, an attorney at Ashborne, to make the articles, but that gentleman had too much integrity to engage in the affair; however, they found out a limb of the profession who was not so scrupulous and the articles were actually signed, and a delivery of the goods made on the 5th instant, and

we are told both sides are at present well pleased with the bargain.

THE MANDRAKE.—The same, March 22nd, 1799.—Last week some men being at work at Sir John Evelyn's, in Wotton Park, in Surrey, found under the root of an oak-tree a Mandrake which was taken thence alive, and lived an hour and a half after. Great numbers of persons of distinction daily resort to Sir John's seat to see that great curiosity, the like being never known in the memory of man. A volume of "folk lore" might readily be written upon this curious paragraph, which brings our readers face to face with one of the most remarkable superstitions ever recorded in the history of imposture, credulity, and deception. According to Gerard, the old botanist (who rejects the fable), it was commonly believed that the mandrake is seldom or never found growing naturally, but under a gallows where the matter that has fallen from the dead body gives the plant a human shape—in the likeness of man or woman. They further believed that whoever would take up the plant must tie a dog to it to pull or wrench it up, and that it would give forth a great shriek; otherwise the man who dug it up would die shortly after. Many other "fables of living matters" cannot be reproduced here, but they are well known to antiquaries in connection with this singular plant. We smile at such things now, and we have our own later follies to go on with.

AN ICE RACE.—Jan. 17, 1799.—Last Saturday Mr. Cunningham, of Fulham, galloped a horse on the ice on the Thames from Fulham to Hammermith and back again for a wager of twenty guineas. He was allowed an hour, but performed it in forty-five minutes.

A FEMALE KNIGHT OF THE ROAD.—She was noticed by Shakespeare; Middleton and Decker made her the subject of a comedy; and playwrights and epigrammatists mention her for half a century. Her familiar name was Moll Cutpurse; the name she received from her parents, Mary Frith. A letter in the British Museum (dated February 11, 1612) gives an amusing account of her doing penance at Paul's Cross. "This last Sunday Moll Cutpurse, a notorious baggage that used to go in man's apparel and challenged the field, was brought to the same place (Paul's Cross), where she wept bitterly, and seemed very penitent, but it is since doubted she was maudlin drunk, being discovered to have tumbled off three quarts of sack before she came to her penance. She had the daintiest preacher or ghostly father that ever I saw in the pulpit, one Radcliffe, of Brazenose College, Oxford, a likelier man to have led the revils in some inn of court than to be where he was. But he did extremely badly, and so wearied the audience that the best part went away, and the rest tarried, rather to hear Moll Cutpurse than him. Butler has sung her praise:

A bold virago stout and tall,
As Joan of France, or English Mall.

It is difficult to say whether Butler meant to depreciate Joan of France or exalt English Mail by this association. She robbed General Fairfax upon Hounslow Heath, and left twenty pounds by her will for the conduit to run with wine when Charles the Second was restored.

A NATURAL COMPLIMENT.—As Georgina, the "beautiful Duchess" of Devonshire, was one day stepping out of her carriage a dustman, who was accidentally standing by and was about to regale himself with his accustomed whiff of tobacco, caught a glance of her countenance, and instantly exclaimed: "Love and bless you, my lady, let me light my pipe at your eyes." It is said that the duchess was so delighted with this compliment that she frequently afterwards checked the strain of adulation, which was constantly offered to her charms, by saying: "Oh! after the dustman's compliment all others are insipid."

LADY ARCHERS.—Royal and noble ladies in the days of Elizabeth delighted in the somewhat unrefined sport of shooting deer with a cross bow. In the "alleys green" of Windsor or of Greenwich Parks, says Charles Knight, the queen would take her stand on an elevated plat-

form, and, as the pricket or the buck was driven past her, would aim the death shaft, amidst the acclamation of her admiring courtiers. The ladies, it appears, were skilful enough at this sylvan butchery. Sir Francis Leake writes to the Earl of Shrewsbury:—"Your lordship has sent me a very great fat stag, the welcome being stricken by your right honourable lady's hand." The practice was as old as the romances of the Middle Ages, but in those days the ladies were sometimes not so expert as the Countess of Shrewsbury, for, in the history of Prince Arthur, a fair huntress wounds Sir Launcelot of the Lake, instead of the stag at which she aims.

BARBARA FANE.

The gay young widow,
Barbara Fane,
With her springy step
Came down the lane—
And won my heart;
The more's the pity,
She stormed the gates
And took the city!

Very pretty
Is Barbara Fane—
Wise and witty,
Is mine the gain?
I sat in the window
And sighed with pain,
I sighed—for there
Came down the lane
A gallant youth
With Barbara Fane.

She raised her eyes—
They are deep as night,
And bewildered me
With their mocking light!
When he looked in her face,
Where the rose did seek
The lily to chase
From her oval cheek,
She shook her tresses
Of rippling gold
With a charm, though felt,
Can never be told!

Oh, Barbara!
Beautiful Barbara Fane,
I'll close this window
Over the lane,
And draw the curtains
Over my heart!
And still, if I can,
This stinging smart!
And never—oh, pitiless
Barbara Fane,
Shall your mocking eyes,
With their rapturous bane,
Look on the luckless
Bard again!

Z. B. G.

STATISTICS.

RUSSIAN REVENUE.—The Russian revenue seems steadily declining. The Budget for 1881 estimates it at £62,800,000, or nearly £4,000,000 below 1880. On the other hand, the expenditure is increasing slightly, being estimated at £67,400,000, as against £66,625,000 last year. The deficit will, it is expected, amount to about £5,000,000. Again there are rumours of a railway loan, which is merely another name for a loan to the state, as the Russian railways have not as yet proved paying undertakings, and if they have not been so in the past they seem still likely to be so in the future.

THE LIFEBOAT SERVICE IN 1880.—The list of the services rendered to shipwrecked crews by the lifeboats of the National Lifeboat Institution during the storms of the year which has

just closed shows a total of 570 lives and twenty-six vessels saved from destruction. In the same period the Lifeboat Institution granted rewards for saving 120 lives by fishing and other boats and other means, making a total of 690 lives saved last year, mainly through its instrumentality. Altogether, since its formation, the society has contributed to the saving of 27,596 shipwrecked persons.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LEMON PUDDING.—Two eggs, four tablespoonfuls of flour, one-half cup sweet cream, one cup sweet milk, one tablespoonful butter, one cup sugar, grated rind and juice of one-half lemon. Bake in a moderate oven.

APPLE FRITTERS.—Beat three eggs very lightly; then stir in one teaspoonful of salt, one-half-cup of sugar, one pint of milk, two cups of chopped apple and two cups of flour. Flavour with nutmeg. Stir all well together, and fry in lard as pancakes. Sift sugar over them and send to the table.

ORANGE SALAD.—Peel eight oranges with a sharp knife so as to remove every vestige of skin from them; core them as you would core apples; lay them either whole or cut in slices in a dish, strew over them plenty of powdered sugar; add four bananas cut in slices, the juice of a lemon and a little more sugar; keep the dish covered until serving.

MISCELLANEOUS.

NEW ACTS OF PARLIAMENT.—The following Acts came into operation on the 1st January: The Employers' Liability Act, An Act to Regulate the Management of Taxes under the Inland Revenue Commissioners, An Act to Abolish Imprisonment for Debt in Scotland, An Act Regulating the Carriage of Grain Cargoes in Merchant Ships, and An Act to Consolidate the Law Relating to the Manufacture and Sale of Spirits.

There are now close upon a thousand expelled French Jesuits in England, where they have determined to settle.

A GRAND international congress of velocipedists is to take place in Paris on the 6th February next, when a banquet will be given.

A BABE found one morning shortly after the publication of Lord Beaconsfield's novel, by a railroad watchman, was taken to a police-court and by the court christened "Endymion."

IN Bond Street, Conduit Street, in London, and the streets adjacent, some 500 capital houses, some of them inhabited by members of the aristocracy, are let to tenants who are in the complete enjoyment of all the benefits the three F's system is expected to confer. The rents are moderate even for ground-rents, the average being under £10 per annum; they can never be increased, except by the wilful neglect of the tenants themselves, and the leases can be and are constantly sold, without let or hindrance of any kind on the part of the landlords. Thus, we have a system of fixed tenure and free sale carried out to a large extent in one of the wealthiest and most prosperous parts of the metropolis.

THE FIGURES OF 1881.—What has only occurred once in a century for eight hundred years occurs this year, viz., the two middle figures being the same and the first and last figures the same. Thus in 1881 two 8's are the middle figures, and the first and last figures the same. This occurred 110 years ago, namely, in 1771, before that in 1661, and so back to the year 1601. This coincidence will not again occur till 1991, but eleven years afterwards, namely, in 2002, we shall have the same relative position of figures. No year for 110 years before has been, and no year for 110 years to come will be so circumstanced.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

OUR CORRESPONDENTS should in all cases furnish us with their names and addresses. Letters signed simply with initials or a nom de plume may not always receive immediate attention, as our space is limited. No charge is made under any circumstances for advertisements appearing on this page.

MACHINIST.—One of Willcox and Gibbs's Automatic machines will be found eminently suitable to your requirements; they are neat, swift and quiet. You save both time and money by getting a good thing at first.

C. W. F.—Feed the parrot only on sopped bread and canary seed. The plucking of the feathers arises from giving it hemlock, bones, and other heating articles.

ANNIE G.—A tooth powder to prevent the gums receding from the teeth is thus made: Powdered myrrh, one ounce; powdered sage, two drachms; best honey, two ounces. Mix, and rub the teeth and gums night and morning.

R. K. M.—Bathe your head in a solution of borax and water twice a week. We know of nothing better to allay itching.

M. S. D.—Rusty nail water will generally remove freckles. Use every night with a soft linen rag.

LOUISE.—The eyebrows and eyelashes will grow after they have been burnt if they are clipped so as to get the scorched or scorched part off, but we believe they are liable to always be a little stiff.

C. H.—The pimples to which you refer are probably caused by the food which you partake of. Avoid very salt, rich, or greasy articles, and take occasionally a dose of magnesia, and in a few weeks we think the pimples will cease to annoy you. The best blood purifier we know of is yellow dock root, which can be procured at any druggist's.

A. M.—If varnished work becomes defaced, and begins to show white spots, take equal parts of linseed oil and turpentine, put them in a vial, shake till thoroughly incorporated, then pour in small quantities on a soft cloth, and apply to the spots. Repeat till the colour is restored, and then with another clean soft cloth wipe the mixture off carefully. In deeply carved furniture, if the dust has settled so as to be difficult to remove, use first a stiff-haired paint-brush to get out as much of the dust as possible before using the wet sponge; then roll the sponge up in the hand, and rub it into the carving two or three times; rinse, and rub dry with the chamois, and finish off by wrapping the dry skin around a blunt stick or crochet needle, and drying every damp place in the carving. This need not take more time than is occupied in telling it.

A. A.—We know of nothing better for the hair than castor oil and brandy. The proportions are three ounces of oil and one ounce of brandy.

B. C.—To remove grease from velvet, rub the spots on the material lightly and rapidly with a clean, soft cotton rag, dipped in chloroform. Repeat the operation if necessary. Be careful, as we have said, to rub the article lightly and rapidly; then finish with a clean, dry cloth. If these precautions are not taken, a slight stain is apt to be the result.

N. D.—The largest of the three great pyramids of Egypt, the pyramid of Cheops, called the Splendid, covers an area of about twelve acres. The present vertical height is 450 feet against 479 feet originally, and the length of the sides is 746 feet against 764 feet originally. The second pyramid, King Shafra's, and called the Great, measuring originally 707 feet 9 inches on the sides, and 454 feet 3 inches in height, is now reduced respectively to 690 feet 9 inches and 447 feet 6 inches. The third, the pyramid of Menkaure, called the Superior, is 354 feet 6 inches on the sides and 203 (originally 219) feet high. These three comprise the most celebrated group of pyramids, which number in all about seventy, most of them inferior in size, excepting two of the five composing the Dahshour group, the largest of which is 700 feet square and 326 feet 6 inches high, and the other 616 feet 6 inches square and 319 feet 8 inches high. The exact date of the building of these pyramids is unknown, but is supposed to be from about 2,000 B.C. to 1,500 B.C. With but few exceptions they have been ascertained to be the tombs of kings, usually built or commenced during the lifetime of those for whom they were named.

SCHOOLMASTER, twenty-one, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a dark young lady under twenty.

ALICE and **MIRIAM**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Alice is nineteen, tall, dark, of a loving disposition, fond of music and dancing. Miriam is eighteen, tall, brown hair, grey eyes, fond of home and music. Respondents must be between twenty and twenty-three.

STEARNS and **TRUX**, two friends, would like to correspond with two seamen in the Royal Navy with a view to matrimony. Stearns is medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, fond of home. Trux is tall, dark hair and eyes, fond of home and children. Respondents must be between twenty-five and thirty.

S. E. L., a widower, thirty-nine, fair, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a lady between thirty and thirty-five.

JESSIE, nineteen, medium height, dark hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman between nineteen and twenty, tall, good-looking, fond of home.

ROSE, nineteen, medium height, light hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young gentleman between nineteen and twenty, tall, good-looking, fond of home.

FLORENCE, **ROSE** and **MIRA**, three friends, would like to correspond with three young gentlemen. Florence is twenty-six, fair, fond of home and children. Rose is nineteen, tall, fair, fond of music and dancing. Mira is eighteen, tall, fair, fond of music and dancing. Respondents must be tall, dark, fond of home and children.

THE STORY OF THE FISHERMAN.

WILLIAM, the fisher, who many a year
His trusty net cast into the sea,
Was one who never was cowed by fear,
And was honest as ever a man could be.

Though danger he met in many a form,
In his duty he never was known to fail;
For in youth he was taught to weather the storm,
With its blinding rain and pitiless gale.

One night when the wild equinoctial raved,
A hail came up from the angry sea;
"There's someone, wife, out there to be saved,
I must haste," he said, "to see who it may be."

He hurried away in the dismal night
(For the starry gleam of the sky was dead),
Directed by hope's clear beacon-light,
While in silence an earnest prayer he said.

And clinging close to a rough ledge dim,
He saw, in his lantern's fitful glare,
A trembling form looking up to him,
Its piteous face blanched with despair.

He launched his boat on the white-capped wave,
And his strong arm clasped the helpless form,
Which he bravely plucked from a watery grave
And bore to his fireside snug and warm.

But many an act, in bravery wrought,
Was done by this humble man of the sea,
Who lived in a limited realm of thought,
Whose sun was the light of simplicity.

He owned not gold nor a large estate,
Yet his deeds were worthy, though his ways were plain,
And his life, though bound to a lowly fate
And a little sphere, was not passed in vain. C. D.

JIB and **SPANKEE**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young ladies with a view to matrimony. Jib is twenty-two, fair, fond of home and music. Spankee is twenty, dark, fond of home and children.

RUBY and **PEARL**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men. Ruby is eighteen, tall, dark hair, blue eyes, good-looking. Pearl is seventeen, medium height, fair, good-looking. Respondents must be between eighteen and twenty-two, dark, good-looking.

ROSE, **SHAMROCK** and **TRISTLE**, three friends, would like to correspond with three young men. Rose is twenty, medium height, brown hair, dark eyes, good-looking. Shamrock is eighteen, tall, dark hair, blue eyes. Tristle is seventeen, medium height, Auburn hair, grey eyes. Respondents must be between eighteen and twenty-five, tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

LOVELY LOTT, a domestic servant, twenty-one, fair, would like to correspond with a young man between twenty and twenty-five, dark.

LOUISA and **CHARLOTTE**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men with a view to matrimony. Louisa is seventeen, dark, of a loving disposition. Charlotte is nineteen, fair, fond of home and children. Respondents must be twenty-one, dark, fond of home.

CLARA and **FLORA**, two sisters, and **EMILY**, a friend, would like to correspond with three young men. Clara is twenty-three, medium height, brown hair, fond of home and children. Flora is nineteen, medium height, dark, fond of music and singing. Emily is twenty-one, tall, brown hair and eyes.

D. H., twenty-two, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a tall, dark young man about twenty-four.

H. S., thirty, short, dark, would like to correspond with a young lady about twenty-six.

VIOLET and **CONSTANCE**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Violet is twenty-one, medium height, dark, brown hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of music and dancing. Constance is nineteen, medium height, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of music and dancing.

NELL and **MEG**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen. Nell is sixteen, fair, blue eyes, fond of music. Meg is seventeen, dark, grey eyes, fond of dancing. Respondents must be between twenty and twenty-five, tall, dark, good-looking.

A. C., dark hair, blue eyes, would like to correspond with a young man with a view to matrimony.

HETTY, eighteen, tall, dark hair and eyes, of a loving disposition, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young gentleman with a view to matrimony.

ROMEO, twenty-four, good-looking, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young lady between nineteen and twenty-one, dark, of a loving disposition, fond of home.

LOUISE F., nineteen, brown hair, grey eyes, fond of home, would like to correspond with a young gentleman between twenty-one and twenty-two, medium height, good-looking.

LEONARD W., twenty-one, dark hair and eyes, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a fair young lady about twenty.

VIOLET and **ROSEBUD**, two friends, would like to correspond with two young gentlemen with a view to matrimony. Violet is twenty-one, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, fond of dancing. Rosebud is nineteen, medium height, brown hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition. Respondents must be about thirty, tall, dark, good-looking.

HARRY, nineteen, tall, fair, fond of home and children, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

LOWEY CLARRIE is responded to by—Joe the Marine, medium height, fair hair, blue eyes, of a loving disposition.

A. W. by—Polly, seventeen, of a loving disposition.
W. A. W. by—Molly, nineteen.

ROLAND by—Eola, seventeen, tall, light hair, blue eyes, fond of home and children.
ROLAND by—May.

VERDANT by—Ina.
VERDANT by—Rose H., eighteen, tall, light hair, blue eyes.

HYACINTH by—S. B., twenty-three, medium height, brown hair, good-looking, fond of home and music.
BLUEBELL by—T. F., twenty-three, tall, fair, good-looking, fond of home and music.

COUNTRY BEAUTY by—C. H., twenty-two, fair.
LAUREL by—Nellie, twenty-one, medium height, brown hair and eyes, of a loving disposition.

GLOVE by—Alice, eighteen, dark hair and eyes, fond of children.
BUGLE by—Lucy, twenty-three, tall, fair, fond of home and music.

GLOVE by—Hand, tall, fair.
LAUREL by—Ivy, tall, fair.
BUGLE by—Call, medium height, fair.

VIOLET by—M. G. W.
LOWEY CLARRIE by—Ernest.
LAMPLIGHTER by—Cissy.
R. I. M. by—J. F., nineteen, tall, dark, of a loving disposition.
E. D. by—E. B., medium height, dark, fond of home.

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†† We cannot undertake to return Rejected Manuscripts. As they are sent to us voluntarily authors should retain copies.

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